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**THE ABBESS.**

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J. Darling, Printer, Leadenhall Street, London.

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# THE ABBESS.

A ROMANCE.

By W. H. IRELAND,

AUTHOR OF

BRUNO, OR THE SEPULCHRAL SUMMONS; GONDEZ THE MONK;  
RIMUALDO, OR THE CASTLE OF BADAJOS;  
THE CATHOLIC, &c. &c.

---

Let modest matrons at thy mention start,  
And blushing virgins, when they read our annals,  
Skip o'er the guilty page. SHAKSPEARE.

---

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

SECOND EDITION.

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LONDON:

PRINTED FOR A. K. NEWMAN AND CO.

1834.





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# THE ABBESS.

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## CHAP. I.

Oh ! I will sooner trust a crocodile,  
When he sheds tears ; for he kills suddenly,  
And ends our cares at once ; or any thing  
That's evil to our natures, than a man !  
I find there is no end to his deceivings,  
Nor no avoiding them, if we give way.

BEAUMONT.

THE conte Marcello rose unrefreshed, his mind strongly agitated by the events of the preceding night. He well remembered the madre's threats—these he disdained ; but Maddalena was in her power, and he had every thing to dread from the violence of her disposition.—

sition. — “ For what,” said the conte, “ can equal the rage of a turbulent woman, when disappointed in her love? Is there a stratagem she will leave untried, to satiate her thirst for vengeance, even on the innocent Maddalena Rosa? now, indeed, she will put her threats into execution; now she will prove the friendship of her dependents; she will doubtless employ the subtle monk Ubaldo, who wears religion’s outward cloak, to conceal the villainy of his heart; and shall the lovely Maddalena become their prey, and I alone the cause? must he, who doats to distraction, destroy perhaps the very object of his tender love? Forbid it, Heaven! I will unto the duca, and instantly reveal the affair. I will convince him of his daughter’s innocence. I will confess — Hold!” cried the conte, “ what can I confess? my oath, my solemn vow, has sealed my lips for ever. Most crafty woman! most deceitful friar!

your

your arts, indeed, have proved successful; you enchain me by the strongest tie, my honour—which must for ever remain unsullied. Yet will religion sanction my silence? Will even-handed justice bid me view the sufferings of the guiltless, whose upright conduct I could prove, and calmly behold the triumph of the offenders? or would prudence have directed me to enter into a sacred engagement, without being first acquainted with the exact terms of my obligation? 'Tis I who am culpable; my youth does not excuse my fault, or rather my crime, for such it is. Yet, surely, the duca is open to conviction; he will place confidence in my honour—Why do I thus delay?—Why not instantly visit him, and request an audience?"

The conte rose from his seat, and having hastily arranged his dress, immediately proceeded to the Bertocci

palace. On demanding admittance, he was informed by the porter, that the duca was then engaged. He retired disappointed, but determined to continue for some time near the spot, and then return. At the expiration of an hour, the conte, being on his way to the duca's residence, beheld, at some distance, the monk Ubaldo, walking with unaccustomed speed towards the convent of Santa Maria.—“The padre has visited the palace before me,” exclaimed the conte, “and by his seeming alacrity, his story has, I fear, succeeded but too well. Calumny! thou art swift of foot; thou hast fabricated thy mischievous tale, and now thou hiest to thy den, to glut thyself on those scenes of misery thou hast planned!”

The monk, at that moment, turned the corner of the strada, and disappeared. while the conte proceeded to the mansion of the duca. He again applied

for admission; but was informed, that the noble owner had given express orders, that no one should be ushered in to his presence till the following morning. The conte assured the porter, that his business was of the utmost consequence; but this information did not avail. He then made the domestics acquainted with his name; on which he was informed, that the duca had cautioned his servants against admitting *him* in particular. On hearing this, the conte became acquainted with his fate, and concealed with difficulty the rising emotions of his bosom. After a moment's pause, the conte slowly quitted the hall, and returned to his palace, absorbed in gloomy meditation.

“What is to be done?” he exclaimed, as, entering his chamber, he threw himself violently on his seat—“How can I counteract the infernal schemes now planning against the lovely Maddalena’s

repose? How can I baffle the attempts of my enemies, who seek to poison my every hope of happiness? Yes, for I now feel, more than ever, the power of her attractions. I am conscious that she reigns triumphant o'er my soul; that her enchanting image is indelibly stamped on my heart; that I live but to adore her, and in the fond hope of one day calling her mine. I will demean myself to this haughty abbess; yes, I will, by letter, entreat her to spare the unoffending boarder, and let her vengeance fall wholly on myself. I shall but fulfil my duty; it is a justice which I owe oppressed innocence; for what is the sacrifice of my feelings? Ought I not to sue for Maddalena on my bended knee? Can the guilty humble themselves enough, or make sufficient atonement, when they have involved, though unintentionally, another in their misdeeds?—Had I quitted Maddalena's presence, ere the monk's arrival, all had  
been

been well. Did she not entreat that I would retire, and yet I disobeyed her? What right had I to intrude myself into her society? I adored her, it is true; my ardent love urged me to break on her meditations: yet my passion is perhaps hopeless. Unmoved, she listened to my protestations; nor did she betray the least emotion of pity for my sufferings, till the moment that separated us. Yes, her regard was then expressive of compassion; it was a look of tenderness, that will never be erased from my fond fancy."

The conte shortly after drew towards the table, and penned the following lines:

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*"To the Madre Vittoria Bracciano,  
Abbess of the Convent of Santa Ma-  
ria del Nova.*

"MADAM,

"Acquainted as I am with  
your unalterable determination of re-

venge, you will, doubtless, esteem me presumptuous in troubling you with the following lines. Yet ere you proceed, believe me, madam, I do not intend to plead for myself. I claim not your pity; it is for Maddalena Rosa that I would petition, whose innocence, whose purity, must strike conviction on your soul. I know you smile at my presumption: I see the air of triumph that marks your features, on beholding me, the menial slave of your caprice, a servile dependant on your will. Yet, I can bear your scorn unmoved. Yes, I will supplicate your favour, though you cast on me the smile of contempt; for I plead the cause of virtue.—Madam, you fill a holy office; you are abbess of the first convent in Florence: too well I am acquainted with your sentiments; too well I know, that your outward habit alone proclaims you religion's votary. Your mind retains a partiality for the voluptuous scenes of this world, and  
is



is not wedded to its Maker. To your innate sense of religion, therefore, I appeal not; but to that unerring monitor, your conscience, that will, in spite of your endeavours, rear its throne within your bosom, and goad you for the guilty deed. Maddalena Rosa is innocent. By that sacred vow which binds me to silence respecting all that has passed between *us*; by that oath which makes *me* shudder, and *you* exult; by that I swear, she is pure and spotless of any charge concerning me, that you may be prompted to allege against her.

“ You, madam, are but too well acquainted with the manner of my gaining admittance into the convent. Appearances, I own, are in your favour: my being discovered, at that early hour, with Maddalena Rosa, argues strongly against her; but chance alone conducted me to that apartment, where the powerful workings of fancy had unconsciously led her. Oh, madam! temper

your rage with mercy ; revenge is a momentary gratification, which, in the end, recoils on those who fallaciously hope to experience, through its means, a lasting enjoyment. Call into action the noble passions of your soul ; have pity on the innocent sufferer, and *I* will submit with patience to your rigorous decrees. I shall then heap blessings on your head, for the blow will fall on him who alone merits chastisement, on him who is prepared to meet his fate.

“ MARCELLO PORTA.”

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Having sealed this letter, the conte intrusted it to the care of Gerardo, who immediately quitted his master's palace for the convent of Santa Maria. The conte thought it necessary to attest Madalena's innocence in such solemn terms, lest the madre should imagine that the meeting between them had been really concerted, and that his feigned love was  
only

only to gain admission into the convent to fulfil his appointment.

The conte, in the utmost suspense, awaited the trusty Gerardo's return. Two hours elapsed, when he at length appeared.

"Thank Heaven! dear master," said he, on entering the apartment, "I am safe returned from the holy sisterhood; 'tis a rare thing to be endowed with virtuous inclinations."

"Tell me," exclaimed the conte, hastily, "have you brought any answer from the madre?"

Scarce had he uttered the last word, when Gerardo interrupted him.—"Yes, master; it is praiseworthy in any man to curb his passions; mine have been attacked with sighs and ogles, but I have escaped victorious: like a prudent general, I kept my boiling blood under command."

The conte found it necessary to remain silent, and Gerardo continued as follows : —“ You must know, signor, that I hied me to the convent with all possible speed. On my arrival, I sounded loudly the bell, when the portress, peeping through the small grating in the door, inquired my business. I presented the letter, and she immediately unbolted the gate, and bade me enter, when I followed her to her apartment : she desired me to be seated, and wait her return. In a few minutes she re-entered, saying, it was the lady abbess’s will that I should await her commands. The portress then seated herself beside me ; she smiled—she ogled, and, sighing, asked me why I was not a holy father : my round, ruddy face, she assured me, would become the cowl amazingly ; that I was a very proper man, and should make an excellent confessor. I thanked her, signor, for the good opinion she had conceived of me ; but I really think my  
countenance

countenance must have appeared very silly; for she had, considering her sex, a monstrous crop of hair upon her upper lip, and I with difficulty restrained my risible faculties. She then extolled the pious pleasures of a religious life; she conjured me, with something more than sisterly affection, to quit the wicked ways of the world, and seek in retirement the pleasures of divine love; nay, signor, she kindly offered to instruct me herself in the first rudiments; and became at length so inspired with the celestial flame, that, had not one of the lay sisters entered the chamber with the madre's answer, she might have carried her pious desire into execution. I gladly took the letter, under the promise of returning in a few days, to convince her I had profited by her good counsel."—Gerardo now leisurely put his hand into the pocket of his vest, and drawing forth the madre's billet, presented it to his impatient master.

The

The conte could not help smiling at the loquacity of Gerardo, who bowed and quitted the apartment. He hastily broke the seal, and read as follows :—

---

*“ To the Conte Marcello Porta.*

“ SIGNOR,

“ Your entreaties—your protestations, are alike unavailing. You have infringed the holy laws of our sanctified mansion, and unceasing vengeance shall pursue you. The madre Vittoria can feel an injury, and will not fail to resent it.”

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“ Most wicked, artful, and detested woman!” exclaimed the conte; “ does, then, no generous sentiment glow within your bosom? Are you callous to every call of virtue?”

The conte then hastily read over again the malicious scrawl.—“ Oh madre,  
this

this is well done! this equivocation suits your deceptious conduct. You pretend to be unapprehensive of my meaning—you answer me as really guilty of the crime wherewith I am charged—and *you*, the virtuous and offended party; but the hour may one day arrive, when truth shall blaze abroad, and justice doom the guilty. You will then be roused from your lethargic dream, and wake to horror and despair.”

The conte spent the remainder of the day, agitated by a thousand painful ideas, that crowded alternately on his fancy.

He repaired the following morning to the Bertocci palace, and, being admitted, was led into a saloon, where he was requested to await the duca's arrival, The door of the apartment soon after opened, and he entered. The conte rose from his chair, and was approaching  
towards

towards him, when the duca coldly begged him to resume his seat.

After some moments' pause, during which the duca regarded the conte's features with fixed attention, he addressed him as follows:—"This is, I believe signor conte, the second time I ever was in your company. At our first meeting, I thought you amiable; I looked upon you as a pattern for the young men of the age: you appeared to possess an open disposition, a mind that revered virtue, and strictly adhered to its maxims. I thought that bosom a stranger to deceit; your air, your manner, inspired confidence. I inwardly gloried in beholding such a man. 'Had my son,' thought I, 'lived to have resembled you, I should have been completely blessed.' I could not harbour a doubt; I was convinced my senses could not be deceived. I invited you to my palace; I wished to clasp you to my breast, and  
call



call you my friend. These were my emotions at our first meeting ; but how reversed is now the scene ! I am, I trust, signor, a man of honour, one that holds deception in abhorrence : I must therefore entreat you to hear me out with patience. I shall speak openly ; should you find yourself over-galled at my expressions, you know the remedy ; we are both men, and wear our swords to guard or avenge our honours.”

After a short pause, the duca continued : —“ At this meeting, signor, I look upon you as possessing talents, but they are of the most dangerous description. Your seeming openness of disposition, the virtues of your mind, all the good qualities which appear concentrated in your form, are but a pleasing exterior, veiling the depravity of your soul.”

The conte started, and placed his hand on his sword ; but recollecting it was

was the father of his *adored* Maddalena Rosa, resumed his former position.

“ I presume,” continued the duca, “ that you are not unacquainted with the convent of Santa Maria; and you well know that my daughter is a boarder there.”

He paused; and the conte answered in the affirmative.

“ That daughter, signor, once resembled her beloved mother; she was delicate in every point of female reputation, till you first beheld her. Your arts have drawn her from her duty; you have made her swerve from the path of rectitude: you have gained such ascendancy over her mind, that, o’erleaping every law of decency, she admitted you at the dead hour of night, and lent a willing ear to your unhallowed love. Can you deny the charge?—Did not the lady abbess, and a monk of Santa Croce,

Croce, interrupt your sacrilegious converse?"

"Monsignor, what you advance is in part true. The madre Bracciano and father Ubaldo did indeed surprise me in your daughter's presence; but that daughter was unacquainted with my entrance into the convent; it was the first time I ever, by word or letter, held converse with her: it was then, for the first time, that I made an avowal of my passion."

The conte then related his having previously seen her through the grate, of his remaining for some time a stranger to her name and family, and by what means he obtained the wished-for information. He then most solemnly protested Maddalena's innocence; he described the manner in which he had discovered her; and execrated the base assertion that had poisoned the duca's mind.

"I would this tale were true," replied the duca; "but it rests on two points:

points : first, if you entered the convent with no design of meeting Maddalena, for what purpose was you there ? and secondly, how did you gain admission ? and whence does it arise, that the portress of the convent, the same morning, fled ?”

The conte, on hearing the last assertion, exclaimed aloud—“ The plan of villainy is then complete : no means of vengeance are left untried to crush the guiltless !”

To the first of these questions, the conte was, by his oath, compelled to preserve silence. He could only protest the fallacy of the charge, and that a solemn vow bound him to conceal the method of his entrance, and his business in the convent. To the second, he assured the duca that, till this moment, he knew not of the portress’s flight, but deemed it a contrivance of his secret enemies.—“ But, monsignor, you will be one day undeceived ; you will then clasp  
your

your injured child to your fond arms; you will then, I trust, confess the conte Marcello Porta is not unworthy of your esteem. As to the opprobrious epithets you have so wrongfully lavished on me, I forget them; first, as you are Maddalena Rosa's father, and a nobleman whose merits I revere; secondly, because you have heard a well-told story, that might even deceive the most suspicious mind, much more yours, which, unpractised in deceit, is the less prone to discover the tale of a slanderer. Ah! signor, could I, in honour, recal my rash vow, I should silence the voice of calumny; I would baffle the machinations of my enemies; but that is impossible. I should then appear, in your eyes, a perjured, mean, dishonourable wretch!"

There was something in the conte's behaviour that astonished the duca. A steady firmness, attendant only on truth,

truth, accompanied his words : yet, the evidence against him appeared incontrovertible.

“ Signor,” said the duca, “ you allege an oath ; yet I cannot penetrate how a rash vow, in which you have involved yourself, should be connected with the subject in question.”

“ This is a circumstance, monsignor, I cannot explain ; but I pledge my honour as a man, that donna Maddalena Rosa is innocent ; that I am basely calumniated ; and that the sacred compact, by which I am restricted, prevents me from satisfying your doubts. Let donna Maddalena state to you the manner of our meeting ; and, if her narrative corresponds not in every point with what I have advanced, then let foulest shame attend me ; let ignominy brand my hated name ; adjudge me guilty of the heinous crime, for such it would be, wherewith I am charged.”

“ It

“It were difficult,” returned the duca, “for me to hold the conference you desire. I have business of importance with the grand duca, which will for some time detain me in Florence; and my daughter is, ere this, far removed from the convent of Santa Maria.”

“Removed!” hastily repeated the conte, in violent emotion. “Monsignor, you are a just and upright nobleman; be then impartial; suspend awhile your rigid judgment; condemn not to misery the being, who lives but in the fond hope of one day standing forward as the vindicator of your daughter’s injured reputation, when I may boldly offer, even with your sanction, my heart, my hand, and fortune, to the peerless Madalena.—Spare her—punish not your guiltless child: doom her not to a melancholy seclusion from——”

“Signor conte,” said the duca, rising, “I am her father, and the best judge of my own actions. If my daughter’s affections

affections were fixed on any particular object, her happiness should never be made subservient to my will: she should be free in every point but one. Yes, the duca Bertocci will not bestow donna Maddalena's hand, unless it be on a man of noble birth and of unsullied honour."

He instantly quitted the apartment. The conte remained some minutes in a profound reverie: he at length retired from the saloon, and pensively returned to his palace, where he immediately penned the following note:—

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*" To the Duca Bertocci.*

" MONSIGNOR,

" When I entreated a suspension of your judgment, the request was made in the warmth of my passion, at hearing of your lovely daughter's unmerited removal from Florence. I  
meant



meant it not as an impeachment of your judgment, nor was it uttered in a dictatorial manner: yet, should you have misconstrued my intention, I entreat your pardon. The last words you uttered, monsignor, previous to quitting the apartment, were these:—‘ I will not bestow donna Maddalena’s hand, unless it be on a man of noble birth, and of unsullied honour.’ The first requisite, ’tis acknowledged, I possess; and though, monsignor, you may suspect the other, yet, when it proves *untainted*, I dare hope that you will not reject the suit of the now unjustly traduced

MARCELLO PORTA.”

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Gerardo was immediately dispatched with this billet. He soon returned, having delivered it to the duca’s porter, at the palace-gate. The conte then prepared to visit his friend Viviani, whom he was desirous of consulting on the best method of procedure.

## CHAP. II.

Let us not aggravate our sorrows,  
But to the gods permit the event of things :  
Our lives, discolour'd with our present woes,  
May still grow bright, and smile with happier hours.  
So the pure liquid stream, when foul with stains  
Of rushing torrents and descending rains,  
Works itself clear, and, as it runs, refines ;  
Till, by degrees, the floating mirror shines ;  
Reflects each flower, that on the borders grows,  
And a new heaven in its fair bosom shows.

ADDISON.

MADDALENA awoke the following morning at an early hour : her dreams had been similar to those that visited her pillow, during the tranquil nights she spent in the convent of Santa Maria, while her beloved friend Marietta was yet living. She surveyed the spacious chamber with astonishment ; and some time elapsed, ere she recollected

lected the quick succession of events, that had brought her to this secluded mansion.

The wainscot of the apartment was of dark-brown cedar, that rendered its appearance particularly gloomy. The chimney-piece was lofty, over which was carved, in oak, the crest and motto of the family. The windows were small, and partly dimmed with stained glass, representing the armorial bearings of the noble house of Bertocci. The bed was of rich damask silk, embroidered with gold. Its colour had once been green, but little of its original dye was now visible. The chairs were of ebony, most curiously wrought; and several ancient portraits, at full length, which, by the arms inserted in the corner, showed them to be ancestors of the duca, were adorned with massy frames, and hung round this chamber.

Maddalena rose, and having dressed herself, determined to survey, as far as she was able, the gloomy interior of this venerable fabric. She immediately passed through the same rooms she had traversed on the preceding night; the furniture greatly resembled that in which she had reposed. She then proceeded along the hall, which was spacious; and, opening a door on the opposite side, entered a narrow avenue. At the extremity of this was a staircase, which she ascended. It communicated with a wide Gothic gallery, which received but a partial light from casements lofty and narrow.

She continued to the further end, and opening a large folding-door, found herself in a spacious library, stored with an innumerable quantity of books. This discovery afforded Maddalena the most heartfelt satisfaction; and she inwardly exclaimed—"How have my suggestions

tions wronged the best of parents ! He has not left me without resources ; for here is the mind's recreation. In this chamber, I shall never lack society."

She took from one of the shelves a folio volume ; but was disappointed, on opening it, to find an ancient manuscript, the characters of which she could not decypher. Maddalena tried several others, but they were written in such an unintelligible hand, or printed at such a very early period, and in the Latin tongue, that, with the trifling knowledge she possessed of that language, she found it impossible to peruse their contents. She determined, however, not to abandon the pursuit, and gradually proceeded from shelf to shelf, till she gained the opposite side of the chamber, where she found the pains which she had taken amply requited, as that part of the collection consisted,

for the most part, of French and Italian books.

Maddalena quitted the library, and proceeded to investigate, still further, the numerous apartments of this Gothic castle. She found a small room adjoining, the windows of which, being low, afforded her an opportunity of observing the surrounding prospect. To the right, at some distance, appeared the mountain, which she had descended the preceding night; wide round its base the gloomy and extensive forest reared its dark green foliage; while to the left, all was a bleak waste, that chilled the soul of the beholder.

As our heroine fixed her gaze on this dreary scene, the appearance of horsemen, whose course seemed bent towards the forest, arrested her attention; when more narrowly examining them, she perceived they were her late conductors.

The

The hope she had, till that moment, indulged, of writing to the duca, to protest her innocence, and entreat he would not unheard, condemn her, had now vanished. Maddalena hastily opened the casement, in the hope of making herself heard; but recollecting the impossibility of her voice attaining them, she retired, dejectedly, to a seat, being nearly overcome with the poignancy of her emotions.

She at length arose, and traversing the chamber several times, again bent her steps towards the window. For an instant, the horsemen were visible; when entering the forest, they were quickly buried in its impenetrable gloom. She continued to fix her eyes on the spot where they had disappeared, as the morning breeze, that waned round her, gently agitating her glossy hair, revived in part her drooping spirits. After some minutes, she

closed the casement, and quitting the room, continued to explore this ancient pile.

Maddalena soon gained an apartment, the furniture of which greatly surprised her. The walls were covered with paintings, from the most gloomy scriptural subjects. The seats were of ebony; at the back of each was inlaid the resemblance of a skull, carved in ivory. Between the windows, which dimly shone with stained glass, representing the crucifixion and resurrection, stood a table, of corresponding workmanship with the seats, on which rested a large silver crucifix, exquisitely wrought. She minutely examined this gloomy habitation, fitted for religious retirement; at the opposite side of which hung a curtain of sable. Curiosity prompted her to discover the object it concealed; but, as she approached, it gently waved. Maddalena paused—  
seized



seized with unwonted dread ; she partly turned, to quit the spot, when, summoning more resolution, she became more ashamed of her pusillanimity.—“ What have I to dread ? ’tis the guilty mind alone that shrinks beneath fear’s chilling hand.” With firmness she approached the hanging, which she drew back, and found it was indeed the wind that had caused the trepidation of her spirits ; for before her, was a closet communicating with the chapel, whence she conjectured her ancestors used formerly to hear mass celebrated.

This castello had been the family residence from time immemorial. On a small desk lay a missal, whereon was beautifully embroidered the family escutcheon. She gazed on the chapel, which was of superb Gothic architecture, and, though in a state of desolation, its pristine elegance was plainly visible. Dust obscured the fretted roof,

and loathsome spiders now wove their wily webs, where the priest had so often displayed the sacred host. The stern resemblance of her warlike ancestors, whose venerable remains had long mouldered beneath their sculptured effigies, inspired Maddalena's soul with thoughts of departed greatness.—“ Perhaps,” said she, “ it was one of those, when living, that founded this very pile. Could he now rise, and behold the dreary scene that surrounds him—could he traverse the spacious halls and numerous chambers of this castello, once his pride and glory, how would his great soul sicken at this sight! how he would despise his degenerate children for quitting this edifice, which he had reared with such pains, and which has braved so many storms!”

Maddalena continued moralizing, unconscious of Maria's approach, who stood regarding her in speechless astonishment.—“ By our lady, signora, I thought  
some

some ghost had conveyed you from the castello.”

“What could induce you,” returned Maddalena, smiling, “to form such a conjecture?”

“Why, my lady, I have been seeking you this hour. Your repast has long been served, and waiting for you in your apartment. My father has also been in pursuit of your ladyship through the left wing of the castello.”

Maddalena followed her conductress, who led her into one of the most elegant apartments she had yet beheld, where every thing was rendered as commodious as possible.

Maria's parent entered, who, bowing respectfully, begged to know how his sweet young mistress had reposed.

Maddalena, having satisfied his kind inquiry, thanked him for this mark of

his attention, and then informed him, how well she was satisfied with the care he had evinced, in preparing the necessary accommodations. She then requested to know if any of her father's domestics were yet remaining at the castello, and whether the duca had intimated the term of her residence there.

The old man replied in the negative; that he and his daughter were now the sole inhabitants of the castello. He then acquainted Maddalena with the duca's orders, which were positive—"That she should never quit the walls on any account, and that the drawbridge was constantly to be drawn up." This, he assured her, was the whole of her father's message to him.

Maddalena, having ordered her trunks to be unpacked, seated herself at the breakfast-table, determined, as soon as the repast was concluded, to commence  
the

the perusal of the narrative of Giacinta's sufferings, Shortly after, she repaired to the chamber where she had reposed during the night; and, unlocking the portmanteau that contained the manuscript, found that it was addressed to the contessa Orazzi, being to the following purport:—

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*COMMENCEMENT OF ISABELLA'S NARRATIVE.*

“ I HAVE complied, madam, with your request. The ensuing pages will display the history of the hapless Isabella: the recital has recalled the most afflicting sensations; yet, should it afford you the smallest satisfaction, my pangs will be alleviated.

I am the youngest daughter of the conte Gregorio Orazzi, of Naples. At an early period I was placed, as a boarder, in one of the convents of that city, where I received an education suitable  
to

to my rank. At the age of fourteen, I possessed a disposition alike calculated for gaiety or solitude. Sometimes I mingled with the youthful boarders, and was a partner in their mirth; at others, I sought the society of the most melancholy of the sisterhood. I was alternately pleased with these opposite sensations, and I became the friend of each inhabitant of the convent.

The abbess was every way calculated for the situation she held; and added to the virtuous qualifications of the mind, a figure tall and gracefully formed. She possessed a dignity of mien, that insured respect from the world, and inspired love in the breasts of the sisterhood.

Soon after attaining my fifteenth year, I was conducted from this mansion of peace (for, such I may justly style it), to the Castello di Leon, the constant residence of my family. As I arrived within sight of the embattled habitation  
of

of my ancestors, the shades of evening stole o'er the surrounding landscape; and the stillness was interrupted only by the faint breeze, sighing among the leafy trees, or the buzzing hum of the hornet-beetle. I felt a violent dejection steal on me, which even the approaching interview with my parents did not tend to alleviate.

On my arrival at the castello, I was conducted into a spacious apartment, where I found the conte, and the contessa, my mother. Our meeting was affecting; tears of joy coursed down their cheeks, as they alternately pressed me to their bosoms. 'This sudden exclamation at length escaped the conte's lips—"Thou, Isabella, art my only child; all are now lost to me, save thee alone."

I gazed on him with a look of astonishment, and felt a weight at my heart. The conte, overcome by his afflicting sensations, resumed his seat, and sobbed aloud.

aloud. I flew to my mother, and, throwing myself on her bosom, entreated her to explain the meaning of my father's words; but she was unable to reply, and burst into tears.

The conte, after a pause of some moments, desired that I would make no further inquiries, but await patiently till the morrow, when I should learn the cause of their affliction. He endeavoured to assume, during the evening, an air of tranquillity; but his efforts proved unsuccessful; and my mother's face was constantly bathed in the dew of sorrow.

“Such was the painful reception I experienced on my returning to the beloved authors of my existence. I retired to my chamber at an early hour, where I passed a considerable time in conjectures concerning the purport of my father's words.

I was conscious of the inherent virtues of my parents; my infantine years had led me to imagine, that integrity of  
conduct



conduct insured eternal happiness. Ah, madam ! I have since learnt, that even the unerring are subject to affliction, and ofttimes a prey to the machinations of the wicked.

Hortenza, my eldest sister, and my brother Alfonzo, I supposed absent at Naples (for neither of them felt happy, when separated from the gay scenes of life). They had seldom visited me at the convent; I had consequently never experienced a sister's friendship or a brother's affection.

Hortenza had betrayed, from her earliest infancy, an unhappy gloominess of temper; and her mind was morose, and strongly tinctured with superstition. In vain had the joint efforts of my parents been exerted to root out these foreboding symptoms in her disposition: their gentle admonitions were received with sullenness, and, if my sister spoke, which was but seldom, her manner was contemptuously forbidding.


Alfonzo,

Alfonzo, when a child, possessed much dissimulation, and always evinced the greatest love of pleasure. This passion had ripened, with his years, into libertinism, and he pursued with avidity the dissipation of the city.

Inwardly I trembled, lest my brother's conduct might have caused my parents' sorrow ; yet, was unwilling to credit the suggestion ; and even taxed myself with want of affection, in harbouring such an idea. I spent the night, occupied with these unpleasant thoughts, and descended, the following morning, anxious, yet fearful, of learning the truth. I silently partook of the repast, at the conclusion of which, my father broke silence, and thus addressed me—" You know, my Isabella, in my visits to you, when an inmate of the convent, I have frequently expressed my disapprobation of your sister's conduct, who has now irrevocably forfeited every claim to my affection, by uniting herself contra-  
ry

ry to my inclinations. 'Tis true, her husband is of distinguished birth, but his principles are the most odious. His striking person, and insinuating manners, won her affection, and she united herself to him, when on her late visit at Naples, without consulting either mine or your mother's consent. Conceive our affliction, on learning the event by this letter."

The conte then unfolded a billet, which he held, and read nearly to the following purport:—



" MY LORD,

" Being conscious that I should never obtain your previous consent to the step which I have taken, I was determined not to subject myself to a refusal. The nobleman to whom I am allied, is in every respect worthy to be your son; and surely, my lord, I am now of sufficient years to judge for myself.

self. Should you, and the contessa, my mother, be disposed to welcome my husband as his merits deserve, we will, on the messenger's return, immediately quit Naples, to throw ourselves at your feet; but if you do not intend to receive the man of my choice with cordiality, he spurns the idea of debasing himself, by further submission to those who so unjustly condemn him.

“HORTENZA.”

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As my father concluded this unfeeling epistle, the letter dropped from his hand, and his emotions for a short time stopped all utterance. At length he again addressed me, and thus continued:—“Such, my Isabella, was thy sister's conduct, which I answered, by commanding her absence, on pain of receiving my eternal curse; and the following day deputed a person to pay the fortune which my sister had bequeathed

Hortenza,

Hortenza, and bid her a final adieu. But, alas! my Isabella, I had another shock to sustain—another child to lose! and, wert thou not present to console thine unhappy father, he would sink under the pressure of his misfortunes. The day of my daughter's marriage was to me a day of accumulated horrors, for thy unfortunate brother fell a victim to the poniard of an assassin."

Here my father's feelings overpowered him. I felt for the unmerited sorrows of my honoured parent, and plentifully bathed his hand with tears of grief and commiseration.

I inquired the name of my brother's murderer; but my father informed me, that all attempts to discover the perpetrator had as yet proved ineffectual, but that he had employed proper persons to trace his son's companions and pursuits, by which means he might be enabled to judge the quarter from whence the blow had proceeded; that, for the purpose of  
better

better information concerning Alfonzo's unhappy fate, he had directed that a stranger, wounded in endeavouring to save his life, and now lying at the inn where his servant called on his return, should be conveyed to the castello di Leon, that, when recovered, he might, from his mouth, obtain a description of the assassins. In the mean time, as he knew not but that his son's trespasses might have drawn this misfortune on his own head, he intended that his funeral should be private ; for this purpose he issued the necessary orders, and in two days his domestics returned, bearing the corse of the wretched Alfonzo.

My father's distress was so great, that he was unable to behold the remains of his son, which were that evening deposited in the family vault, under the chapel of the castello.

My mother, who had sickened immediately on hearing of Alfonzo's death (of whom, notwithstanding his loose  
way

way of life, she was immoderately fond) becoming worse and worse, in a few days expired.

My father, overwhelmed with this new calamity, was confined to his chamber; and though in a distressed state of mind, and totally inexperienced, I was, by that means, compelled to be the directress of the affairs of the family. My time was almost wholly occupied in attending my mourning parent.

Sometimes I visited the chamber of the wounded stranger, who had been conducted to the castello by the conte's orders. I had, at first, admired his courage, in succouring my unhappy brother, and, at each succeeding visit, I beheld him with increasing admiration. My attentions to him, which I imagined were the effect of humanity, I found, at length, to my confusion, were the offsprings of love.

In our conversations, he informed me that his name was Frederigo; that his  
parents

parents resided at Naples, and were more rich in nobleness of blood, than the gifts of fortune. Our interviews were as frequent as my parent's dejected state, and the domestic affairs, would permit.

My father at length visited Frederigo, from whom he gained the desired intelligence respecting Alfonzo's assassins. The information but added to his melancholy ; for, by inquiries, he found that my brother had met his fate from the avenging hand of a youth, whose sister he had most basely violated, and who had in consequence expired of a broken heart. This was a deathblow to my wretched father : from that moment he yielded himself a prey to silent despair. The day would often transpire without a word escaping his lips. I wept, I moistened his cheek with my tears ; but they tended not to soften his heart, frozen by misfortune.

Frederigo's anxiety on my account did not escape me ; it greatly retarded his



his recovery. One evening, after having unbosomed to him my thoughts respecting the situation of my revered parent, he arose, after my quitting the chamber, and, dressing himself with the utmost difficulty, proceeded to the conte's apartment. Judge then, madam, my astonishment, at finding him there, in the act of consoling my sorrowing parent. This proof of his tenderness quite overpowered me ; I gazed on him with enthusiastic rapture. He perceived the strong workings of my bosom—a faint blush suffused his pallid cheek, and he withdrew his eyes from me, that they might not add to my confusion.

Frederigo's appearance, at the moment of my entrance, I never shall forget ; he was kneeling at my father's side—his hands clasped one of the conte's, and his expressive countenance, rendered languid by the sickness he had endured, was bent anxiously upon his. Frederigo's eyes, bathed with the sparkling

dew of commiseration, resembled a heavenly messenger, pitying the sufferings of a virtuous soul.

I approached my father's bed—I threw myself beside him, and pressed to my bosom that hand which he had held to his heart. By our mutual endeavours, he at length bent his regard from heaven, on which it had been fixed, first upon me, and then on Frederigo. At that moment a sigh escaped him—it proceeded from his sorrow-burthened soul. I felt his hand violently agitated—his eye became more fixed; Frederigo cast a momentary glance on me, then hid his face; he knew too well the event that must inevitably ensue.

My father then, in broken accents, uttered these words:—"Yes—I am content—one virtuous child—bless my Isabella! Generous youth, protect my—helpless—"

His breath grew short, a cold dew issued

sued from every pore, and my father sunk, broken-hearted, in our arms.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Maddalena's emotions overpowered her; she threw down the manuscript, unable to proceed, nor could she acquire sufficient resolution to resume the subject that evening.

## CHAP. III.

—My plot grows full of death :  
Murder is playing her great master-piece ;  
And the sad sisters sweat, so fast I urge them :  
Oh ! how I hug myself for this revenge !  
My fancy's great in mischief : for, methinks,  
The night grows darker ; and the lab'ring ghosts,  
For fear lest I should find new torments out,  
Run o'er the old with most prodigious swiftness :  
I see the fatal fruit betwixt the teeth ;  
The sieve brim-full, and the swift stone stand still.

LEE.

THE conte Marcello Porta hastened to the hotel of his friend Viviani, whom he fortunately found at home.

“ My dear conte,” said he, on entering his chamber, “ I have much to communicate to you, and stand in need of your kind assistance.”

“ Well, conte, I rejoice that my friendship is now put to the proof,” replied Viviani.

Vivani. "You solely relied on me; I promised that your confidence should not be abused: I am, therefore, in honour, as in inclination, bound to assist you to the uttermost."

"Enough, Viviani; now hear me," said the conte.

He then explained, as he had before done to the duca, his unfortunate interview with Maddalena, in the convent of Santa Maria, carefully concealing, as by oath bound, every circumstance that might criminate the madre Bracciano. He then related his subsequent meeting with the duca Bertocci, repeating the whole conversation that had passed between them.

"I cannot, my dear conte, for a moment doubt your veracity. I, therefore, give implicit credence to your narration. But what is this cursed vow, in which you have thus heedlessly involved yourself? Your silence concerning the method of gaining admittance into the

D 3

convent,

convent, condemn yourself and the innocent Maddalena Rosa. The abbess, too, may justly carry her threats into dreadful execution; for you have apparently violated the holy sanctuary of chaste virgins, and, by profane comparison, insulted their heavenly patroness's name. Even temporal justice dooms you; how much more, then, will the Holy Inquisition exert its rigour, to punish this infringement of religious and moral duty! Indeed, conte, I myself tremble for your personal safety. Can you by no means procure absolution from your rash oath? Are you so irrevocably bound, that no means are left to extricate yourself from the impending danger? Consider, conte, a guiltless creature is involved in a similar predicament with yourself. Remember also, that being is far dearer to you than your own existence."

"I have fully weighed all these circumstances," replied the conte, hastily;

"and

“and notwithstanding I am compelled to remain silent, can I act dishonourably? No, Viviani, never shall Marcello Porta disgrace the name of his noble progenitors. I beseech you, therefore, to question me no further on this point. Give me your counsel; tell me the method I must pursue; instruct me how I shall discover the route by which my adored Maddalena has been conveyed from Florence—for, then, I will listen to your words—I will say it is my friend that speaks, that reanimates me with life and hope.”

“Attend to me, conte,” said Viviani: “in this point, I think, you cannot fail of success. It is most probable, that those persons who by the duca’s orders conveyed his daughter hence, will speedily return, to give him intelligence of her safe arrival at the destined spot. Do, therefore, place a domestic acquainted with the persons of the duca’s household, at each gate of the city; bid them

narrowly watch every traveller and every carriage entering Florence. If they are so fortunate as to trace one of them to the duca's palace, you may, at least, judge of the road she must have taken, and, by judicious inquiry, gain a knowledge of her present residence."

"Your counsel is just, Viviani; and I sincerely thank you. I will this moment put the plan into execution: should it succeed, I will immediately set out, accompanied by Gerardo, to the place of her retreat."

"Excuse me, conte," exclaimed Viviani, passionately; "*I* must also be a partaker in this expedition. Do you think me such a lukewarm friend, as not to brave all danger for your service?"

"You are over hasty, Viviani; you will more essentially serve me by remaining in Florence, to keep a watchful eye over the dark proceedings of the madre Bracciano, than by making yourself a companion of my search."

A few



A few moments' reflection convinced Viviani of the prudence of this measure ; and the conte soon bad adieu to his friend.—“ If I return not this night, you may conclude our scheme has proved successful, and that I have departed from Florence, in pursuit of my lovely Rosa.”

The conte was soon at his palace, who instantly dispersed his servants as agreed, every one joyfully obeying their lord's commands. The gentleness of his character had so much endeared him to them, that not one would have scrupled to die in the lawful service of so good a master. He then bade Gerardo prepare two of the strongest horses in the stable, and ordering his travelling-dress and arms, desired he would also hold himself in readiness to attend at the shortest notice.

The weary hours elapsed, without  
D 5 the

the wished-for intelligence, and towards evening the anxious conte threw himself on a couch, his agitated mind finally yielding to the impulse of sleep; but it was a disturbed and broken slumber, that wearied more than it calmed his tortured breast.

The conte rose unrefreshed, despairing of success, and continued in this state of incertitude till a late hour, when being on the point of visiting his friend Viviani, one of the domestics brought intelligence that he had traced five horsemen, whose jaded steeds with difficulty supported their riders to the Bertocci palace. The overjoyed conte was instantly mounted, and accompanied by his trusty Gerardo, well armed, was soon without the precincts of Florence, and well advanced upon the road by which the duca's servants had arrived.

They continued their route, without interruption,

interruption, for some time ; when suddenly they were arrested in their course, by two roads branching off in contrary directions. The conte looked around, but saw no habitation where he might gain intelligence which track Maddalena had taken. His impatience not brooking delay, he pushed forward to the right: it was fortunately that which led to the duca's castello.

The night was dark, and the air bleak, but the conte felt not its influence ; for love's bright flame glowed in his raptured breast. Not so Gerardo—he was not like his master, but felt its piercing influence : wrapping his cloak around him, he trusted more to its experienced efficacy, than to Cupid's aid.

Those bright gems, that spangle night's sable robe—that pale orb, that lends its partial light to guide the weary traveller, was now invisible ; still the

conte proceeded, till his horse, who had deviated a little from the road, meeting some unseen obstacle, stumbled, and threw him with violence to the ground. Gerardo, who was close behind his master, heard him fall.

He immediately alighted, proceeding to the spot where the conte lay extended, and found his master had received a violent contusion in the side. He assisted him to rise, and notwithstanding his servant's entreaties to the contrary, was bent on immediately remounting his horse. Supporting himself on Gerardo's arm, he approached the animal; but as he attempted to raise his foot into the stirrup, he experienced such acute pain, as compelled him to relinquish the idea.

The moon at this instant reflected a friendly gleam, and Gerardo perceived a venerable ruin at no great distance. He  
immediately

immediately fastened the horses to a neighbouring tree, and then supporting his master, they slowly moved forward towards the spot. Having passed the grand entrance of this decayed building, they found the mouldering pile capable of affording them shelter till the morning. Gerardo, having seated his master on a stone, took from his pocket a strong cordial, with which he had had the precaution to provide himself, in case of accident, and presented it to the conte, who quaffing some of the liquor, at Gerardo's recommendation, found himself much relieved. His trusty servant with joy perceiving the favourable alteration, hastily unbuttoned his master's vest, and rubbing the side affected with some of the liquid, the pain sensibly diminished.

The moon continuing to lend her light through the Gothic cavities of once rich-emblazoned windows, now by  
ruthless

ruthless and unsparing time destroyed, the conte was enabled to form a probable conjecture respecting the design of the building. It appeared to be the remains of some house of piety, which the religious possessors might have quitted for a better site.

The conte found himself behind one of the pillars that supported the roof, near its once-seeming splendid choir. While Gerardo was anxiously waiting at his side, suddenly they heard a noise. They listened; and the sound of approaching footsteps met their ears. The unthinking Gerardo, who considered only his master's situation, was for instantly quitting the spot to demand assistance; but the more cautious conte checked his impetuosity.—“What if a lawless banditti should frequent this spot! and I cannot see why honest men should seek refuge, at this lonely hour,  
in

in this dreary edifice," whispered the conte.

This was sufficient to detain Gerardo. The footsteps at length moved slowly along the opposite aisle; now words were distinguishable; and as the strangers advanced, a voice exclaimed—"It must be near the hour; we are sure of success; one servant alone accompanies him in his journey. You must secure him, and leave the master to my care."

The conte looked from behind the pillar, and observed three men, one of whom carried a dim light, which he endeavoured to conceal. They continued discoursing, till they arrived at the grand gateway (by which Gerardo and himself had entered), and through the same they immediately passed.

"Whom can the villains mean?" said Gerardo, addressing his master in a low voice.

voice. "By saint Geronimo! they shall fight hard ere they injure you, my dear lord."

The conte remained silent, not doubting but that his motions had been traced by the emissaries of the madre Bracciano, and that they were now commissioned to accomplish his assassination. A considerable time elapsed, without any thing further being heard, when Gerardo was for quitting the ruins, and taking horse, to fly the impending danger; but the conte saw the impossibility of putting this plan into execution—"For," said he, "if it is my life they seek, we cannot escape; they are now in waiting on the road, and would undoubtedly surprise us; it is therefore more expedient that we remain in our present situation till morning, when we may ascertain the strength of our opponents."

In a short time the sound of footsteps



steps were again heard, and the conte, from behind the pillar, saw one of the men re-enter, bearing the lamp, preceded by a person whose face was turned from the conte.

“Where would you lead me?” exclaimed the unfortunate prisoner. “Is your intention murder? Yet shall it not escape detection. Know you not my rank? and that the grand duke will assuredly seek, and punish, with excruciating torture, my base assassin?”

“Too well am I acquainted with you!” exclaimed the other; “nor would I forego this opportunity of revenge for the grand duca’s dignity.”

They proceeded along the church, and as they retired by the opposite side of the choir, the sound of the retiring footsteps grew fainter.

“Come, Gerardo,” exclaimed the  
conte,

conte, rising from his seat, " we will pursue this midnight murderer, and frustrate his detested plan."

Gerardo drew his sword, and followed the conte, who had already unsheathed his rapier. They cautiously advanced after the strangers, who, at the extremity of the choir, descended a narrow staircase, conducting to a long passage, whither the conte and Gerardo followed. It terminated in a large vaulted chamber, and, from the faint light gleaming from the villain's lamp, the conte perceived that this had once been a receptacle for the dead, as piles of human bones were heaped on either side. At the further end of this vault, the murderer stopped, and having unbolted a small door, bad the traveller enter. The conte then advanced; and the door being partly open, discovered a spacious chamber, the entrance to which was by a descent of three steps; there the villain,

lain, who was masked, made a halt, the conte and Gerardo still remaining without.

“ Now, monsignor,” said the bravo, “ I have you secure.”

He then placed the lamp upon the pavement, the light from which, striking full upon the face of the traveller, whose hands, he now perceived, were secured with cords, displayed, to the conte’s utter astonishment, the lineaments of the duca Bertocci. He was about to rush forward, when an ardent desire to ascertain the motive of this premeditated crime, withheld him.

“ You think, duca, that I am a masked robber, who has thus seized you, in the hope of obtaining a rich booty ; but I will undeceive you.”

At this moment he threw back his  
cloak,

cloak, and, unmasking, displayed the figure of a very elegant youth, of noble and commanding mien. On viewing his countenance, the duca started, as if some extraordinary spectacle had struck his sight, and he appeared, for a time, lost in amazement. The conte was equally astonished; for, in the assassin, he beheld features, which, though clouded with revenge, were expressive of every noble virtue. The duca continued to exhibit marks of horror, pity, and astonishment, and suddenly exclaimed—"Who is it I behold?"

"Monsignor, you are a stranger to my person; it is revenge that nerves my arm to deal the blow."

"What!" cried the duca, "must I then die? And is it your hand that must direct the vengeful steel?"

"Yes, duca," replied the youth, drawing a poniard from his girdle, "I have vowed eternal hatred to your house—  
'tis

'tis I that must avenge my injured father!"

"Thy father!" reiterated the duca, "I know him not, or wherefore you thus earnestly seek my life"

"Though the depravity of your conduct may have slept within your bosom, yet my father's revenge has long sought this opportunity."

"For the love of Heaven," returned the duca, "plunge not *thy* dagger in my breast! I will willingly bare it to the stroke of some other hand, and save thee from the horrid deed, which must for ever haunt thy guilty soul!"

"My revenge would be then incomplete," replied the youth, "therefore prepare——"

"Hold yet a moment!" said the duca; "I render up my life—but yet, while I behold thy countenance, in spite of this my dreadful situation, I feel a yearning in my bosom, that prepossesses me involuntarily in thy favour."

The

The youth approached, with the uplifted poniard, heedless of his supplications, when the duca, whose hat had till that moment partly covered his face, dropping on his knee, the motion caused it to fall to the ground. The conte rushing forward, sought to prevent the blow, but was prevented, by his cloak becoming entangled in the bolt of the door. The youth then rivetted his eyes on the duca's countenance—the dagger fell from his grasp, and he remained speechless and immoveable; then, violently clasping his hands, as actuated by some sudden impulse, fixed on the still-kneeling suppliant a look of inexpressible anguish, and, turning hastily from him, flew like lightning to a remote corner of the chamber, and instantly disappeared.

Gerardo had by this time descended the steps; and the conte, having extricated himself, immediately pursued the assassin,

assassin, while his domestic was busily employed in loosening the cords that bound the duca's arms. When at liberty, he desired to know to whom he was indebted for this friendly interference. On ascertaining from Gerardo that he was a domestic of the conte Marcello Porta, the duca started.—“And who is it that now pursues the base attempter of my life?” continued he.

“It is, my lord, the conte himself,” replied Gerardo.

The duca stood petrified at this intelligence; yet, notwithstanding the youth, whom the conte pursued, had sought his life, he felt an interest in his fate, for which he could by no means account, and secretly wished that the conte might not impede his escape. Directing Gerardo to return, and guard the main entrance of the building, he endeavoured to pursue the track which the conte had taken.

The

The latter, meanwhile, pursued the fugitive with all the swiftness of which he was master ; but his bruised side gave him such increased pain, that he was unwillingly compelled to slacken his pace, by which means the stranger escaped. The duca, when he attempted to follow the conte, had struck into a different passage, leading without the building, thus affording him an opportunity of beholding the youth mounted, and flying at full speed. The duca, whose horses had been left by his assailants with that of the young man, purposely concealed behind the ruined abbey, he quickly vaulted the saddle, and was in pursuit of him.

The conte had with difficulty regained the vault where the recent scene had transpired, and was astonished at finding it deserted : though still racked with pain, he ascended the steps, and, by the aid of frequent pauses, attained the grand  
portal,



portal, where he found the dauntless Gerardo firm at his post, from whom he learned what had passed during his absence. Scarce had Gerardo concluded his recital, when the conte, quite overcome by his late exertion, and the increasing anguish he endured, fainted away in the arms of his attendant.

Gerardo had again recourse to the cordial, which produced the desired effect, by recovering the swooning conte, who would fain have dispatched his domestic in pursuit of the duca; but the faithful attendant entreated the conte, with such pressing importunity, to attend to his present situation, which disabled him from affording the duca any assistance, that he at length yielded.

Gerardo went in search of the horses. which, as it was then daybreak, he readily found, and, leading them towards his master, assisted him to mount.

They then regained the road, from which they had strayed but a small distance the preceding night, and slowly pursued their journey.

The morning was serene; and the glorious luminary, bursting from the east, arrayed in all its splendid majesty, added fresh lustre to smiling Nature's variegated countenance. The harmless feathered race warbled their cheerful matin song. The conte gazed, unmoved, upon this sublime scene. His ear was not enchanted with the melody of the woodland choir, his mind being tortured with unpleasing ideas of the fate of his loved Maddalena, and the duca's present situation. His body was also a prey to the most acute anguish.

After journeying for some time, he with difficulty bore the motion of the horse; but the faithful Gerardo, who kept an attentive eye upon his master,  
observing

observing how unsteadily he supported himself in the saddle, rode up just in time to prevent his falling to the ground.

In this manner they proceeded for upwards of an hour, when Gerardo, to his inexpressible joy, perceived an inn at no great distance. He instantly communicated the intelligence to his master, and used every means in his power to cheer him; but his honest endeavours were ineffectual; the conte was senseless; his languid eyes were closed; and he reclined his head on Gerardo's shoulder.

They at length, with extreme difficulty, reached the wished-for mansion, and Gerardo, summoning the host, by their joint efforts the conte dismounted, who was supported with care into a chamber, where they undressed and conveyed him to bed.

Gerardo's first inquiry was for a surgeon; but the innkeeper acquainted him, no assistance of the kind could be procured nearer than twelve miles. Having ordered what he considered would contribute to his master's recovery, and assured the man that his noble lord would amply reward him for any extra trouble, on the present occasion, he received the necessary direction to find the surgeon; and mounting a fresh horse, set off at full speed to procure the desired assistance; and about noon returned, having fortunately succeeded in his embassy.

By the skill of the practitioner, and the close attendance of his faithful domestic, the conte was shortly restored to a state of apparent convalescence.

His first inquiry of the master of the house related to the road he had travelled; from whom he ascertained many  
particulars

particulars, and, among the rest, the duca Bertocci's having a castello at some distance, which had for many years remained almost uninhabited. The inn-keeper further informed him (for he was exceedingly communicative, the conte having, by his liberality, entirely ingratiated himself), that some of the duca's domestics, attending a carriage, had, a short time previous, called on him for refreshment, in their way to the castello, as he had understood from one of them, who had been his fellow-servant in the Bertocci palace, and that the duca himself, whom he knew personally, had passed the day before for Florence.

From these concurring circumstances, the conte became convinced, that the vehicle could have contained no other than his injured Rosa, and that her father must have been travelling to the castello, when he was so basely seized, and threatened with assassination. He

further doubted not, that after his escape from the base attempt, he had continued his journey, and having fully questioned Maddalena, concerning every occurrence that had transpired in the convent of Santa Maria, was now returned to the Bertocci palace. Full of this idea, the conte, notwithstanding the surgeon's remonstrances to the contrary, determined instantly to recommence his journey. Having munificently rewarded the cares and attention of the practitioner, and his loquacious host, he, once more, took the road, and proceeded towards the Castello di Valdarno.

## CHAP. IV.

E follia, se nascondete  
 Fidi amanti, il vostro foco :  
 A scoprir quel che tacete  
 Un pallor basta improvviso,  
 Un rossor che accenda il viso,  
 Un sguardo, ed un sospir.  
 E se basta così poco  
 A scoprir quel che si tace,  
 Perchè perder la sua pace,  
 Con ascondere il martir? METASTASIO.

.....

What stronger breastplate than a heart untainted?  
 Thrice is he armed, who has his quarrel just :  
 And he but naked, though lock'd up in steel,  
 Whose conscience with injustice is corrupted.  
 SHAKSPEARE.

.....

—————No veil  
 She needed, Virtue-proof; no thought infirm  
 Alter'd her cheek. MILTON.

THE following morning, Maddalena,  
 finding her spirits more composed, was  
 on the point of continuing Giacinta's

sad relation, when the door of her apartment opened, and the duca himself entered.

There was an unaccustomed air of severity seated on his brow, which she had never before experienced, and his piercing regard was bent full upon her. He began by questioning her concerning every circumstance attendant on her interview with the conte. Her answers to his several interrogatories were clear, and corroborated those before given by the conte Marcello. She, in the strongest terms, protested her innocence, and described, as she had before done to the madre Bracciano, the inviolable and tender friendship that had subsisted between herself and the deceased nun, Marietta. She painted, in lively colours, the painful emotions of her bosom, when death severed them for ever. She told the duca that Marietta being present in her sleep, her senses must have yielded



yielded to the powerful delusion; for, on waking, she found herself with the conte, in the very chamber where the lifeless form of her Marietta had been exposed previous to her interment.

The duca lent an attentive ear to this recital. His features relaxed; for such an air of truth accompanied her artless tale, as almost compelled him to credit her narration, though strongly prepossessed against her by the wily monk Ubaldo.—“ Yet wherefore,” said he, “ should the madre Victoria practise such duplicity? The general tenor of her conduct coincides not with a supposition of this nature.”

The duca was perplexed; he well remembered the mention of a sacred vow, by which the conte was bound to silence; all appeared a mystery. Sometimes he was inclined to believe his

E 5      daughter's

daughter's innocence, and the truth of the conte's recital.

He remained some days at the castello, during which time he committed to writing the information of his daughter. His behaviour, during his stay, was as affectionate as it had been, even before this unfortunate occurrence.

Ere his departure, he expatiated on the delicacy of her deceased mother's conduct; he dwelt on the virtues of her mind—he painted Truth in its most bewitching colours, contrasting it with the villainous garb of deception; and then conjured her, if, through fear, she had been impelled to conceal the minutest circumstance, that she would then reveal it. But Maddalena again averred the rectitude of her conduct, solemnly protesting that she had fully related every circumstance. The duca, embracing her, while mutual tears bedew-  
ed

ed their cheeks, quitted the castello at an early hour, having first assured her, that if she proved guiltless, which he doubted not, she should again revisit Florence, and be far dearer to his heart than ever.

During the remainder of the day, Maddalena indulged herself in the fond hope of soon rejoining her parent, to share his much-loved smile; and, in the evening, taking up Giacinta's story, read as follows:—

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*CONCLUSION OF DONNA ISABELLA'S  
NARRATIVE.*

“ MY strength failed—I yielded to the violence of my affliction, and sunk senseless on the floor, nor was for some hours conscious of any thing that occurred.

On awakening from this trance, I  
E 6 found

found myself undressed, and in bed, my faithful servant watching me with anxious care. I had no recollection of the event which had reduced me to this state; I inquired the cause of her tears—I asked after my departed parent, and the situation of Frederigo—but I was answered only by her sobs. I, at length, had a confused idea of what had happened, and rose from my bed with an assumed air of composure. Having summoned my father's steward, I too fully became convinced of my forlorn situation. From him I learnt that my father had, a few days previous to his decease, destroyed his former will, making me sole inheritrix of his property. The knowledge of this circumstance afforded me not the smallest gratification; I was bereaved of the loved authors of my existence—I had for ever lost a brother who should have sympathized with me, and a sister who might have mingled her tears with mine.

In

In this painful situation all idea of Frederigo had vanished, till I was roused to a recollection of him by a billet, which a domestic delivered to me. Therein he condoled with me on the unhappy decease of the conte, and in the most soothing terms doubly regretted my father's loss ; first, as I was bereaved of an affectionate parent, and, secondly, because delicacy urged his immediate departure from the castello di Leon. He entreated me to fortify my mind against the accumulated misfortunes I had sustained ; and concluded with heaping a thousand blessings on my head, which were penned in a manner so fervent, as plainly to indicate the state of his heart.

I instantly recollected his weak state of health, and would fain have sent to entreat he would delay his journey ; but modesty forbad the step, which would indeed have proved ineffectual, as he departed from the castello some hours before

before his letter was delivered into my hands. I, shortly after, attended my father's remains, and saw them deposited in that sepulchre, which had inclosed, within so short a time, my hapless parents and my murdered brother.

As the poignancy of my affliction mellowed into a silent melancholy, I found the form of Frederigo return more forcibly to my fancy. I loved to frequent the chamber in which he had resided. I continually brought his interesting person to my remembrance, when in the pitying act of soothing my heart-broken parent. A thousand times I blushed at my weakness; but the recollection of his tender letter, and the delicacy of his conduct in quitting me, obliterated my former thoughts, and I found, notwithstanding my endeavours to quench the flame, that love had taken sanctuary in my bosom.

Several weeks elapsed, during which time I gave orders for the arrangement  
of

of the family affairs. I had, one evening, wandered, with my favourite female attendant, to some distance from the castello, when one of the male domestics brought me a packet. I thought the superscription was familiar to me; and breaking the seal, found a letter from the loved Frederigo. My hand unconsciously trembled—my heart palpitated with redoubled violence, and I felt the warm glow that tinged my cheek. I perused the lines with avidity: they contained an avowal of his passion, and described, in lively colours, the pangs which had torn his breast, since his departure from the castello; he supplicated forgiveness for this presumption, hoping that the ardency of his passion would plead his excuse; and concluded by entreating an answer by the messenger, to acquaint him with the state of my health.

I could not oppose the strong workings of my breast. To love an amiable  
object

object was not derogatory—why, then, refuse his modest petition? I hastened back to the castello, and penned an answer, which I deemed consistent with prudence, and with which I immediately dispatched the messenger.

From this period our correspondence became frequent, and from our mutual intercourse, he, at length, became acquainted with the real state of my heart. Our epistles soon teemed with interchanged vows of affection. He informed me, that he should, at a fit opportunity, break the subject to his parents, and entreat their consent to the alliance.

At this period I received a most haughty epistle from my sister Hortenza, desiring that I would prepare every thing for her and her husband's arrival, and be careful that every account was prepared, ready for their inspection.

I was astonished at the authoritative tone of my sister, and hesitated as to the steps that were incumbent on me to pursue.



pursue. The state of my mind, since my father's decease, had been such, that I had never once thought of perusing the testamentary paper, whereby I became inheritrix of his fortune. I summoned my steward, and after imparting to him the contents of Hortenza's epistle, he gave it as his opinion, that she thereby indicated the idea of laying claim to my father's whole estate. I instantly ordered the steward to produce the last will in my favour—he sought every place, but it could not be found. Every domestic was questioned, without success, and I became apprehensive some treachery had been practised, and that my sister had planned her measures so well, that I should, doubtless, be compelled to quit the castello, and relinquish all idea of possessing what I was justly entitled to.

In this perplexity, I heard from Frederigo: his letter was more heart-rending than that of my unnatural sister;  
for

for I ascertained from its contents, that the daughter of a nobleman, at Naples, whose person and character were most odious to him, had been violently struck with his person; that her fortune was known to be immense; and that his parents, blinded by her wealth, had in consequence commanded him to seek an alliance so advantageous, and which would tend to aggrandize their impoverished nobility.

Frederigo then informed me, that he had made a confession of his prior attachment to me, at which his father had been exasperated to such a degree, as to threaten him with his eternal curse, if he disobeyed his commands in the smallest degree. The conclusion of the letter proved the distraction of the writer, and the dreadful state of his mind.

I delayed not to answer this heart-rending billet; I described the present unprosperous state of my affairs, which precluded all idea of his avaricious parents

rents ever consenting to our union. I assumed the diction of a philosopher—I explained the necessity there was for this compliance with a father's will; and, obliterating the former impressions I had made on his heart, I consoled him, and used every argument that reason could dictate.

I dispatched this packet — Heaven only knows the pangs it inflicted on my heart; and I, shortly after, received his answer, which was as follows :

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“ And could my Isabella pen the lines before me?—Could she entreat me to forget her, and cancel the bond of faith, by which I have so often sworn everlasting fidelity? Would she, by her arguments, endeavour to prove, that a parent's will should be sacred, though it were to doom the happiness of his child? Impossible!—your words, my loved Isabella, flowed not from the heart; they were the offspring of an ideal virtue, which,

which, if practised, would have dishonoured, and rendered me contemptible to myself. Why did my love endeavour to wound my feelings, by naming the apparent loss of fortune she must sustain? Frederigo's adoration is offered at the shrine of virtuous excellence, and not prostituted before the altar of wealth. It was my Isabella, and not her patrimony, that won my affection.

“ The above lines were written yesternorn, in answer to my Isabella's epistle; 'tis now evening—I have this instant entered the chamber of my friend, who has returned from accompanying me to the palace of the signora's father.—Yes, my Isabella, I have acquainted her that my heart is pre-engaged; I have laid myself open to my father's vengeance, which I shall experience on my return to his hotel.

“ If you should not again hear from me, conclude that violent measures have  
been

been taken by my father; but remember, nothing will compel me to deviate from the line of conduct I have hitherto pursued. Adieu, my Isabella, be resolute; thy Frederigo will be thine till death."

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During the perusal of this letter, my sensations were various. I more than ever admired my Frederigo's fortitude—I gloried in having bestowed my heart on an object so worthy, yet dreaded the effect which his conduct might produce. Thus I passed the day, nor once cast a retrospective view on any object, save my love, my adored Frederigo.

The window of the chamber where I sat commanded a prospect of the principal court of the castello. The evening was gloomy; the dusky bat flitted through the air; and the ominous bird of night, long a resident of this antique mansion, sent forth his dull note. A  
pleasing

pleasing melancholy stole o'er my senses ; I retraced the various unhappy events which had occurred in such quick succession, since my quitting the convent at Naples. I thought of my departed parents ; tears fast flowed at the recollection. I remembered the dying words of my father, naming Frederigo as my protector, and thereby sanctioning our loves.

I was suddenly roused by hearing a loud knocking at the great portal of the castello, and soon after, perceived through the dusk, a carriage and several horsemen cross the court-yard. My attendant soon entered the chamber in haste, and informed me, that my sister and her husband were arrived. I gave orders that they might be conducted into one of the best apartments of the castello, and having composed the hurry of my spirits, I repaired thither to meet them. I gave Hortenza the most affectionate welcome, which she received  
with

with a coldness that almost amounted to disgust. She then introduced me to her husband, with an air of consequence, that betrayed at once the arrogance of her disposition.

His figure was elegant and well-proportioned; he possessed a striking symmetry of features; yet there was a certain expression in his eyes, that, added to a peculiar smile playing on his countenance, inspired the beholder with unpleasing sensations. His compliments to me were profuse, which accorded but ill with the prior reception I had experienced from Hortenza.

I was soon interrogated by my sister, respecting the manner of my father's death. The recital brought tears to my eyes; but she listened unmoved, and questioned me, with the greatest degree of unfeelingness, respecting every circumstance that related to the contessa's and Alfonzo's decease. After having with difficulty satisfied her on these points,

points, she told me to be under no apprehension with regard to myself; for that she would, in her bounty, protect me from want.

I was struck dumb on hearing these extraordinary words, and remained immoveable. When I had in some measure regained the powers of speech, I made Hortenza acquainted with the bequest which the conte had made in my favour, to her total exclusion. She regarded me during my speech with a terrible malignancy, and, sometimes, glanced a look of inexpressibly horrid meaning on her husband.

As I concluded, she desired to see the will, of which I had made mention, when I informed her it was impossible for me to comply with her request, the papers being by some means missing.

On hearing this, she accused me, without hesitation, of attempting to deceive her, by laying a false claim to the estate, to which she, as elder sister, was entitled.



entitled. She was most lavish in her epithets; and, on my attempting to refute the base charge, she ordered me from her presence, and I was conducted by some of her own domestics to my apartment, where I became a prisoner.

I requested of the strange person who attended me, that I might be permitted to see my sister; but my entreaties were fruitless. I then desired that the female domestic who had so long attended me, might be permitted to resume her office. Some days elapsed, and, at length, the faithful Monica was suffered to be near me.

From her, I learned that most of the old servants were removed, and that she herself had only obtained permission to reside in the castello, by seemingly concurring in all their measures. This deceit the faithful creature had practised, to render me every assistance in her power, and watch the wicked proceedings of my sister Hortenza. From

her also, I learned that frequent letters were received from, and sent to Naples ; but that those who attended the person of my sister, and who, perhaps, might have yielded some information, were of repulsive manners, and guarded in their conversations.

I further understood from Monica, that my steward was high in favour, whereby I conjectured, that he had been won to the wicked purposes of Hortenza.

From this period I was treated with every contumely ; and, shortly after, my kind Monica disappeared. All questions concerning her were vain ; for the most menial wretches that surrounded me, heard my inquiries with the most mortifying contempt.

Upwards of two years elapsed, during which time I was compelled to submit to the greatest humiliations which the pride of Hortenza could subject me to ; when, suddenly, all was bustle and confusion in the castello ; new liveries were prepared

prepared for the numerous domestics to attend my sister to a grand fête at Naples, at which all the nobility were to be present.

From the window of my chamber, I, in a few days, beheld the gaudy procession of carriages, horsemen, and lacquies, defile from the court-yard of the castello.

After the departure of this numerous train, a gloomy silence reigned within. I wished to descend into the hall, but found my chamber bolted without. I called several times, and as often listened, but no footstep struck my ear. My mind became a prey to the most terrible sensations, till the lengthened shadow of the turrets, in the court-yard, proclaimed the approach of evening. My dreadful state of anxiety increased; and the idea of my cruel sister having perhaps doomed me to perish unassisted, filled me with terrible apprehensions. I heard

the heavy toll of the chapel bell, and night at length closed in.

A murky darkness shrouded all objects from my view ; the moon's pale orb refused her silvery light ; no friendly star appeared, to cheer the dismal gloom. Wearied, at length, with the contending horrors that crowded on my imagination, and weakened by remaining so many hours without nutriment, I threw myself on my couch. Sleep at last distilled its balmy influence over my wearied eyes.

I was suddenly awakened by a violent noise. I started from my bed ; a light gleamed through the window of my chamber ; the uncommon appearance filled me with dread, and I approached the casement with faltering step : but imagine my horror, when I beheld, by the glare of torches, a group of persons assembled in the court-yard ; and in the midst of them, recognised the features of two domestics belonging to the castello,

tello, who were bound and kneeling. Over them a tall figure waved his sword with threatening gesture, and I heard my name uttered several times with vehemence. One of the servants at length rose, and proceeded before the stranger, when presently ascending footsteps resounded in my ear, which gradually advanced along the passage; the bolts were drawn back—my door flew open, and the terrific figure entered. I fell lifeless on the floor.

On recovering my senses, I found myself seated in a carriage, which moved forward with the greatest velocity. My guide, who had placed himself opposite to me, on perceiving that I had regained my faculties, in a gentle voice desired me to be under no apprehension, for that he was employed by the contessa Menzia, my mother's sister, to relieve me from the tyranny of Hortenza. I was astonished at this information, and requested to know how the contessa

F 3

could

could have gained any intimation of my confinement? His answer was short—he told me she had learned it from Monica.

We continued our route, and soon arrived at Naples, where my conductor delivered me into the expecting arms of this fond relative. My faithful Monica was also present, who shed tears of joy at beholding this interview.

When I had, in some measure, composed my harassed spirits, the contessa Menzia acquainted me, that she had disclaimed all connexion with my sister, since the period of her marriage; it being from her mansion that she had eloped, to give her hand to the dissipated object of her choice. The contessa then informed me, that she had heard nothing concerning myself or my sister, till the appearance of Monica, from whom she learnt the base treatment I had experienced, and the villainous fraud that had been practised,

to

to bereave me of my rightful title to the fortune of my deceased parent. I learnt from my aunt that Hortenza was particularly connected with the female who had attempted to rival me in Frederigo's affections, her husband being nearly related to her; and she then explained the reason of Monica's dismissal from the castello.

My attendant had one morning entered the chamber adjoining to that wherein my sister reposed. She saw several loose papers spread upon the table, and being anxious to gain the least information that might concern me, hastily perused several of them. Among the rest was a sealed packet, which had apparently been that very day brought to the castello, and was placed there for Hortenza's inspection. Monica's curiosity led her to peruse the superscription. The writing was blurred, and she approached the window, in order to decipher it, when, suddenly, she heard the

sound of approaching footsteps. She was terrified, and being unable to replace the packet on the table, precipitately conveyed it into her bosom. At this instant Hortenza entered. Rage flashed from her eyes, and she cast on Monica the most threatening look ; for though my attendant was apparently my enemy, my sister had nevertheless long sought an opportunity to dismiss her. Having severely questioned her as to the reason of her being in that chamber, she ordered her to quit the castello without delay.

Monica endeavoured to give me an intimation of this circumstance, but was so narrowly observed until her departure, that all efforts proved fruitless, and she quitted the castello di Leon for the residence of her parents at Naples.

Soon after Monica's arrival there, an irresistible curiosity led her to inspect the packet she had thus surreptitiously obtained. But conceive, madam, my  
horror



horror and surprise, on learning, that it was from my rival to Hortenza, and contained a deadly potion, which it was intended should be administered in my wine! My sister would have thus been freed from any further importunities on my part, respecting the enjoyment of the estate, and Faustina (for such was my rival's name) would have had no further cause to fear the object who possessed Frederigo's affections.

Monica instantly confided this letter to her father's custody, who repaired, without delay, to the mansion of Faustina's parent. He was no sooner made acquainted with the horrid machinations of his daughter, than he conveyed her that night from Naples, since which period she has never since been heard of.

Monica, having frequently heard me converse of the contessa Menzia, made inquiries, and on learning the place of her residence, repaired to her mansion, where she related every circumstance as

just stated. My aunt, at first, determined on demanding me of Hortenza; but, fearing lest such a measure might endanger my safety, she thought it more expedient to wait a fit opportunity of secretly conveying me from her power. From emissaries employed for the purpose, she at length gained the intelligence of Hortenza and her husband's intended journey to Naples, and the consequent unguarded situation of the castello, when she immediately engaged the bravoës who so well succeeded in their enterprise.

I resided with the contessa Menzia during a year; but an event suddenly compelled me to quit her protecting roof. I had, at first, been particularly circumspect in my excursions into the city, lest Hortenza should have traced my route, and endeavoured to force me back to the castello di Leon. But the revolving months had made me more incautious; and as I was returning one evening

evening from the public walks, attended only by a single lacquey, I was forcibly seized by masked ruffians, who, raising me from the ground, were hastily conveying me to a carriage, which I perceived at some distance; but my domestic, whom the villains had incautiously suffered to escape, having alarmed the servants of an adjoining hotel, they came to my rescue. Already was my foot upon the step of the carriage, when the villains, conscious of their danger, immediately took to flight, and the vehicle drove off with the utmost speed. My excessive terror, and a slight bruise which I received from falling, were the only ill effects which this daring attempt produced.

At my return, the contessa was alarmed for my future safety, as she attributed the whole affair to my sister, and deemed it expedient to place me, without delay, in some asylum of safety. I immediately named the convent where

I had passed my infant years. She cheerfully acquiesced in my proposal, and the following morning I once more entered its venerable walls.

The contessa now deemed it necessary to attempt the recovery of my estates, and laid claim to them in my name. Hortenza defended her right, and the affair still remains a matter of litigation.

Two years I enjoyed tranquillity in this sanctified abode. I found its exemplary superior possessing the same exalted character, which rendered her so worthy of her dignified station. But, alas ! madam, I was still doomed to be the child of sorrow, and shed the bitter tears of affliction ! the abbess suddenly became a prey to the most malignant fever, and, in a few days after its commencement, this virtuous woman, this second mother, expired in my arms.

It was with difficulty that I supported this shock. The convent no longer afforded me happiness, for every ob-  
ject

ject reminded me of my departed friend, and I determined to quit for ever that peaceful abode. I dispatched a message to the contessa Menzia, who shortly after visited me, when I learnt that Hortenza's husband was no more, and that my sister had now taken up her residence at Naples. I then made known to my aunt, the strong desire I had of retiring to some new habitation, and she reluctantly yielded to my entreaties. The contessa then assured me, that every effort should be made to reinstate me in my fortune, and that, in case of Frederigo's return, I should receive from her immediate intimation of that circumstance.

All is now arranged, and to-morrow I quit Naples for the convent of Santa Maria, at Florence, where I intend to assume the feigned name of Giacinta, the better to evade any further attempts of my unfeeling sister Hortenza."

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This

This narrative was intended for the contessa Orazzi; but Maddalena's appearance had so much interested the unfortunate Isabella, that she determined to confide it to her, that their ripening friendship might be thereby more strongly cemented.

As she wept over the pages that contained this melancholy recital, she was interrupted by Gregorio, the old domestic of the castello.—“I hope, signora,” said he, “that you will excuse my transgression, in having disobeyed the duca's orders; but your interest, lady, which is more dear to me, was the cause.”

“I should be but a secondary consideration: if, therefore, you have acted contrary to my father's commands, your conduct deserves reprehension. But what is this fault you speak of?”

“If, signora, you are to inflict punishment, I am well convinced of your lenity. You must know then, my lady,  
that

that the duca bad me strictly to deny admission to every one who should attempt to enter the castello; and I have been rash enough," said the old man, bending his eyes to the ground, "to disobey him."

"You have then acted most imprudently, Gregorio," returned Maddalena. "But who is the person, and what business brought him hither?"

"My lady, if you will patiently hear my recital, I will inform you of every circumstance. As my daughter Maria was crossing the court-yard a short time since, she heard voices from without, entreating admission. She immediately came, and having made me acquainted with their request, I instantly, according to my wonted custom, ascended the small tower that overlooks the drawbridge. On reaching the battlement, I desired to know the stranger's errand, when, by the light of the moon, I perceived a handsome cavalier approach  
the

the moat. He asked me if donna Maddalena Rosa was not a resident of the castello. I did not think it prudent to answer this interrogatory; but, in return, desired to know his business with your ladyship, when he informed me his name was Marcello Porta."

"Merciful powers," exclaimed Maddalena, "the conte here!"

"Yes, my lady," replied Gregorio. "But be not angry, I beseech you; hear me out."

She bade him proceed.

"He then told me, signora, that his life depended on seeing you—that he could not exist without an opportunity of entreating your forgiveness, he alone being the cause of your unmerited confinement. He assured me that he had much to communicate, which might tend to reconcile you to the duca, your noble father. Notwithstanding this, my lady, I still remained obdurate, and was retiring from the battlement, when, falling  
ing



ing on his knee, he solemnly vowed never to leave the spot, till I complied with his petition. He then protested, if it was not your will, he would by no means intrude into your presence. His domestic then most piteously assured me, that his master would strictly adhere to his word, and that they should be compelled to remain on the dreary waste, unsheltered, and without provision. The conte then swore such gentle oaths, and professed his passion for you, my lady, with such a bewitching tongue, that I could no longer resist his entreaty. I descended, and lowering the drawbridge, admitted himself and his follower ; and the conte is now waiting impatiently my return to know your pleasure."

Maddalena was perplexed. She knew not what to answer. She attempted to blame Gregorio for his conduct, but her lips denied utterance to the rebuke.

She

She wished to assume an air of gravity, but ere she could compose her features, they relaxed to their usual air of complacency.

Maddalena wished to behold the conte, yet did not dare admit him to her presence. Now a crimson glow suffused her lovely cheek, as inwardly she felt the quickening palpitation of her heart, which indicated to the blushing Rosa the powerful interest he had there.

She at length desired Gregorio to prepare a chamber for the conte; but bade the old man inform him, that his request she could by no means comply with.—“If,” said she, “the conte has any communication to make respecting me, tell him, it is the duca, my father, to whom he should apply.”

With this message Gregorio returned to the conte, who, notwithstanding, rejoiced

joiced in secret that he should repose beneath the same roof with his Maddalena Rosa.

At Gerardo's first entrance into the apartment of Gregorio, he glanced a look of approbation on his daughter Maria, who felt no small prepossession in his favour. The ceremony of introduction between them was short; for, when the old man returned with Maddalena's message, he found that Maria had already replenished the flagon with wine, and was in earnest conversation with this new guest, while the expecting conte was hastily pacing the chamber, who retired as soon as the apartment was prepared for him, that he might in private indulge his meditations.

Gerardo remained up till a late hour, alternately singing love-songs for the amusement of Maria, and relating facetious stories, with which his brain was well

well stored, for the entertainment of Gregorio.

Those who have felt love's glowing impulse, that glorious passion, the sure inmate of every noble breast, will easily conceive the conte's feelings, during the night. And you, oh fairest of creation!—you, enchanting, lovely woman!—you, that smooth the rough sea of life; whose voice more pleasing sounds than softest music, sweetly dying on the silvery wave! whose thrill-inspiring touch fills our souls with ecstasy! whose languid eyes, beaming love's tender rays, calm our boisterous passions and disarm our rage; with whom this world is a paradise, without, a cheerless desert, and we but ferocious beasts, its wild inhabitants! you must imagine the chaste ideas that—agitated Maddalena's bosom!—you—for you alone, experience such heavenly sensations.

With

With Aurora, Maddalena quitted her couch, and descended into the garden. She approached the tender rose, yet sparkling with Heaven's translucent dew. Now, it evaporates before the sun's warm beam, and adds to its odoriferous perfume. The pearly tear unconsciously stole down Maddalena's delicate cheek; she sighed, yet knew not why, and felt a fluttering at her heart. These were not the drops of sorrow. Her feelings originated in contrary emotions, that thrilled her susceptible soul.

A sigh, that seemed in unison with her own, at this moment floated near her; she turned, and a faint exclamation escaped her lips, as she beheld the conte kneeling at her side.

“Pardon!” was the only word that found utterance; his supplicating eyes spoke the rest.

The

The confused Maddalena was unable to quit the spot. This was sympathy, the indescribable language of the soul, which the warm brain of poets fancy, but cannot paint.

A pause of some moments ensued, ere the conte could proceed.—“Forgive me, lovely creature,” he at length exclaimed; “pardon this rash intrusion; but could I refrain from offering my vows? You are the goddess of the morn—from heaven your light form, borne on a milky cloud, descends to bless the children of the earth—I am the happy mortal who first beholds you—can you then wonder that I thus fall and adore you? Can you blame me for loving that which tastes of heaven?”

“Leave me, conte,” cried Maddalena, in violent agitation—“I must not listen to your protestations: why have you thus disturbed my solitude?”

“Why,” returned the conte, “does  
your

your loved person haunt my pillow, from which soft sleep has winged his downy flight? My couch I left, and in the morning breeze strove to calm my wandering imagination. Why have you now appeared, to rekindle the flame within my breast, and baffle thus my prudent resolution? Yours, my Rosa, is the fault." The conte gently seized her lily hand, and, pressing it, exclaimed—"Why was I born to love, to sigh my passion to the bosom of the wind, that mocks me with the echo of my complaints? Why am I consumed with this inward flame, to live unpitied, and unheeded die?"

Maddalena could no longer hear his ardent prayer unmoved; a sigh gently escaped her lips—the blush upon her cheek outvied the rose's bloom, on which she gazed. Unresisting, she suffered the conte to impress a kiss upon her snowy hand.

“ Tell

“Tell me, lovely Maddalena, may I yield myself to the flattering hope, that, should your noble father prove propitious, you will consent, and crown my ardent passion?”

Falsehood was a stranger to the soul of Maddalena; she could not therefore conceal the workings of her mind; yet delicacy denied an open avowal of her passion, and she remained mute.

“How am I to construe this silence?” continued the conte; “does it augur favourably to my love?—Oh, speak! relieve me from the torture of suspense, for my life depends on your decree! If hateful to your eyes, bid me begone, that I may never more pain you with my presence!”

A look of tenderness, which she at that moment cast on the conte, convinced him



him of his happiness, and he once more pressed her hand with ecstasy.

Maddalena's emotions grew too powerful; concealing her face, she hastily left the garden, and, with disordered step, retired to her apartment. There his loved form followed her—there, unrestrained, she indulged the feelings of her tender breast: she retraced every circumstance of the interesting meeting which had just taken place—contending passions now pervaded her soul. She secretly wished for the conte's society; yet prudence told her how much her reputation might suffer by his residence at the castello, and how far it might tend to confirm the duca in a belief of the monk's slanderous accusation. Her duty predominated over every other consideration, and she determined that the conte should that day bid adieu to the castello.

After the morning's repast, Gregorio entered with a message from Marcello Porta, who humbly entreated permission to be admitted into her presence. Madalena hesitated: her own heart, at length, dictated the answer, for, as she had predetermined the necessity of his removal, she thought there could be no impropriety in admitting him to take a last farewell: she was also assured, that by no message she could so well convince him of the urgency of his quitting the castello, as by her own arguments; Gregorio was therefore dispatched with her permission for his approach.

The conte shortly after entered; but his features no longer wore the same animation as in the garden. His eyes now were bereaved of their lustre—the warm glow had fled his cheek, now possessed by a languid paleness. As Madalena beheld this change, she inquired, in a faltering voice, if he was unwell.

Pressing

Pressing her hand, he thanked her for the kind inquiry, which led him to relate the accidents of the road. Her tender heart sympathized in her fond parent's danger, and adored, with increased fervency, the gallant conte as his deliverer. Some traces of his illness she perceived remained: his indisposition wholly disarmed her. Could she expose the being, for whom her heart so strongly pleaded, to the neglect of strangers? The thought alone conjured up a thousand chimeras—"Perhaps," said she, "another night's repose may fit him for his return to Florence; and shall I not afford him an asylum during that short period?" Love and humanity strongly pleaded, and prevailed.—"Should my father know of this visit, I am sure he will not chide me for an act of piety to his deliverer, for charity is his predominant virtue."

The conte then acquainted Madda-  
G 2 lena

lena with the madre's threats; and he experienced the most violent emotions, when he made mention of the unfortunate oath, which, by sealing his lips, made her appear an accessory to his appearance in the convent.

When he named the dreadful Inquisition, she trembled, not for her own, but for the conte's safety; and she was urged more strongly than ever to his stay in the castello.—“Perhaps,” thought Maddalena, “he may remain here undiscovered, and thus elude the machinations of his enemies.” She well knew the madre's implacable character. She was aware that her power would enable her to put any plan of revenge into execution, against those who were so unfortunate as to excite her anger.

Maddalena begged the conte to call in medical assistance; but he rejected her proposal, adding that, with her permission,

mission, he would reside there till the following morning, when he doubted not he should be able to set out for Florence, as he had determined on again visiting the duca, to make a final effort, and, if possible, convince him of the innocence of his amiable daughter.

During the day, he felt returning anguish from his side, the effect of his over-hasty journey, and which was augmented by the unsettled state of his mind; for he still entertained doubts as to the possibility of eradicating the ill opinion which the duca entertained of him; and on that alone, he well knew, depended a possibility of their union, and the future happiness of their lives. By Maddalena's persuasions, he was at length prevailed upon to retire to bed, and repose himself.

During this time, Maddalena was racked with inquietude, respecting his

recovery. At the close of the day, the conte's disorder considerably increased, and Gerardo, in the course of the evening, declared his master to be in a high fever. Maddalena proved her affection, by attending him with the most unremitting care. Gerardo, in audible terms, demonstrated his sorrow ; not even Maddalena's presence could restrain him ; nor did he seem to pay the least attention to the remonstrances of his Maria.

During the two succeeding days, the conte's fever raged without intermission. In his delirium, he frequently called on Maddalena's name, in terms which evinced his ardent affection. Sometimes, with frantic speech, he threatened the madre Bracciano, uttering mysterious sentences, taxing her with basest perfidy, and calling down vengeance on her head. Sometimes he execrated the monk Ubaldo, as an hypocritical and  
designing

designing villain. Suddenly his tones would soften, and he would protest to the duca, as if present, his own integrity, and the innocence of his daughter.

In this condition the conte remained, till exhausted nature sunk beneath the shocks it had sustained; and at the commencement of the third night, he dropped into a quiet slumber. This was the crisis of his disorder, which proved favourable; for, on awaking, he found himself perfectly sensible of every object around, though reduced to a state of extreme lassitude.

By the constant attendance of Maddalena, he was enabled, in the course of a week from this period, to quit his chamber. Cheered by her inspiring smiles, he enjoyed, in her society, a tranquil happiness, that soon restored him to perfect health.

During his state of convalescence, they frequently wandered in the garden of the castello, where their elegant conversation, and the knowledge they mutually displayed on every topic, endeared them more firmly to each other; and they looked forward with regret to the hour that might perhaps separate them for ever.

One day, when the inclemency of the weather would not permit them to take their accustomed walk, as they were deeply engaged in conversing on the subject of Giacinta, whose story Madalena had imparted to the conte, they were suddenly interrupted by the appearance of Geronimo, whose pallid countenance and trembling frame announced that he had some dreadful intelligence to communicate. Dreadful it was; for he had no sooner regained the power of speech, than he acquainted them officers of the Holy Inquisition

were



were then at the drawbridge, demanding admission.

The conte, at first, received the information with fortitude; but when he recollected that Maddalena might probably be involved in the misery to which he was doomed, he felt his courage droop; and clasping his hands in an agony, exclaimed—"Gracious Heaven! what measures must be pursued? How shall I extricate thee, lovely Rosa—thou injured innocence! Why——"

"Hold, conte," cried Maddalena; "arraign not Omniscience: he is the protector of innocence; then wherefore should we stand in dread of the event?"

Gregorio offered to conceal them in a subterraneous cavern belonging to the castello; but Maddalena would not listen to a proposition which implied in itself a consciousness of guilt. She there-

fore ordered the domestic to give them instant admission.

The officers quickly entered, bearing the dreadful mandate of the Inquisition, whereby they were commissioned to apprehend the person of Maddalena Rosa, and that of the conte Marcello Porta; and forthwith convey them to the prisons of the holy office!

The officials conducted their prisoners in silence without the castello, at the gate of which two carriages were waiting; for that dreadful tribunal, fearful that those against whom their arrests are issued, if more than one be implicated in the same charge, should, by a word or a motion, communicate some hidden meaning, cautiously separate them, the first moment of their apprehension. Maddalena, accompanied by two officers, was handed into one carriage, and the conte, guarded by double  
that

that number, placed in the other. The blinds being drawn up, they drove off, leaving Gregorio and his daughter Maria, in a state of terrible consternation, whilst Gerardo, raving like a madman, went to prepare the horses, and immediately followed his beloved master.

## CHAP. V.

———He stood collected and prepared ;  
 For malice and revenge had put him on his guard :  
 So, like a lion, that unheeded lay,  
 Dissembling sleep, and watchful to betray,  
 With inward rage he meditates his prey.

———He retired unseen,  
 To brood in secret on his gather'd spleen,  
 And methodize revenge. DRYDEN.

.....

Had all his hairs been lives, my great revenge  
 Had stomach for them all. SHAKSPEARE.

As soon as the conte had quitted Florence, his friend Viviani went in person to the convent of Santa Maria. He requested an audience with the madre Vittoria, but was denied admission, and strictly enjoined to importune her no more with his presence. He then placed spies at the gate of the monastery, who

who were deputed to watch the steps of those who entered or issued from thence.

When a week had elapsed, Viviani repaired to the conte's palace, where he found, with astonishment, that the domestics had received no intelligence of their master, since his departure. He returned to his hotel, where he found one of those persons whom he had stationed at the convent gate, waiting his return, from whom he learnt, that a monk had been followed thence to the palace of the supreme inquisitor, and back again to the monastery. That shortly after, a Dominican, known to belong to the holy office, had entered the convent, where he had continued during some hours.

Viviani was greatly alarmed at this information. He felt for the situation of the conte; not in the least doubting that the madre had laid her information  
against

against him before the lords inquisitors, who he knew would pursue measures for his immediate apprehension.

Spite of the madre's orders, he again repaired to the convent, and after waiting a considerable time, was at length admitted into the grated apartment, where the lady abbess soon after appeared, followed by sister Beatrice. The superior, in a haughty tone, desired to be made acquainted with the purport of his visit. Viviani first apologized for his intrusion, by assuring the madre, that it was prompted only by the voice of friendship. He then attested the conte's innocence, beseeching that she would not pursue him for the seeming insult which he had offered her sanctified mansion. Viviani then declared that he knew his friend's motives with regard to the boarder to be most pure, and that he had entered the convent with no evil intention.

“ And

“And from whom did you gain this intelligence?” said the abbess, regarding Viviani with an indignant smile.

“I learnt it from his own lips, which are, I know, untutored in deceit—from the breast of my friend, the mansion of untainted honour.”

“Then, signor,” replied the madre, with a significant sneer, “you have the most unquestionable proof of his innocence; for on the deposition of the accused, a wise judge would assuredly place implicit confidence! but, signor, he has doubtless made you, who seem so interested in his fate, acquainted with the motive of his visit to the convent—you, who appear so much his friend?”

“No, madam,” returned Viviani; “a mysterious vow, connected with this community, seals his lips, which he dares not violate, though it would prove at once his innocence, and clear the sullied fame of Maddalena Rosa.”

“The oath you mention must, indeed,

deed, be of a most extraordinary nature," answered the abbess. " Yet, methinks, signor, it occurred most opportunely that he should meet, during one of his visits here, and at such an unusual hour too, the very object of his passion!"

" Appearances, madam, I confess are against him; yet, notwithstanding, I believe him guiltless. I rely on his word."

" And do you think your friend so honourable, signor, that nothing would compel him to reveal this hidden secret?"

" Yes, madam, I know the firmness of his mind. Death would not urge him to a breach of faith. Life, purchased with the loss of honour, the conte Marcello Porta would disdain, as not worth enjoyment."

A smile of satisfaction seemed to enliven the madre's features, during Viviani's last sentence; and she exclaimed in an elevated tone—" We shall then put this stubborn virtue to the trial."

She paused—her features changed;  
and,



and, darting an angry look at Viviani, she continued—"And who are you, signor, that have thus dared to intrude yourself into my presence? Can you suppose that the abbess of the convent of Santa Maria would pardon this affront? or patiently submit to such an insult? and would act so derogatory, and in such direct opposition to her vows, as to suffer the sanctity of this holy mansion to be sacrilegiously insulted? but why do I thus hold converse with you? I command, signor, that you instantly quit the monastery."

Viviani attempted a reply.

"Do not plead in extenuation of the conte," said the madre, "lest you also become partaker in his crime and chastisement."

He would have answered, but she pointed to the door of the apartment,  
and

and with haughty dignity instantly withdrew from the grate.

Viviani returned with pensive step to his hotel, inwardly execrating the enemies of the conte Marcello. He suffered the greatest uneasiness on his friend's account, being well convinced, from the madre's manner, that she would persecute him with the utmost rigour; and in the Inquisition, he well knew the conte's life to be in imminent danger.

A period elapsed without Viviani's obtaining any further intelligence, till, as he was one day quitting his hotel, he was stopped by the appearance of Gerardo.

"Oh, signor!" cried he, "'tis all over! my poor dear master is now lost for ever!"

"How!" cried Viviani, falteringly; "he is not, surely, *dead*?"

"Ah!

“ Ah! worse than dead! what will now become of him?”

“ Where is he,” hastily inquired Viviani, “ that I may fly to his rescue?”

“ Your attempts would be vain, signor; for by this time he is an inhabitant of a dungeon in the Inquisition.”

“ Then indeed all my fears are verified!” exclaimed Viviani.

“ Yes,” continued Gerardo, “ he will be racked and tortured—and the sweet lovely signora! what will become of her too?”

“ Of whom do you speak besides?” hastily interrupted Viviani.

“ Why, the lovely donna Maddalena de la Rosa, daughter of the duca Bertocci, is the companion of his sufferings.”

“ Merciful Powers! is she then implicated in my friend’s destiny?”

“ Yes, signor; they are both arrested by the familiars of the Inquisition. I shall never more behold them.”

The

The tears flowed fast down the cheeks of the faithful Gerardo.—“ Ah! what will they say at my dear master’s palace, when I tell them the sad news?”

“ How long, then, is it since your return to Florence?” said Viviani.

“ Scarce half an hour is elapsed, signor, since I first entered this city; but, if you think fit, I will acquaint you with the events of our journey.”

Viviani begged him to proceed, and Gerardo related every circumstance that had occurred, to the time of the conte’s and Maddalena’s apprehension.

“ Immediately, signor,” continued he, “ I mounted one of my lord’s horses, and followed the carriage during the rest of the journey. On their entrance into Florence, they drove to the prison-gate, which being opened, the vehicles entered; when, the gate closing, I was debarred from further inquiry respecting  
their

their fate. From thence, as my master's tried friend, I came to seek you, signor Viviani, in order that you might learn the unwelcome tidings."

Viviani thanked Gerardo for the recital, and determined on visiting the duca Bertocci without delay, to acquaint him with his daughter's perilous situation.

Gerardo, with an aching heart, quitted the hotel, and proceeded to the palace of Marcello Porta, while Viviani bent his course to that of the duca Bertocci, whom he found at home, and into whose presence he was immediately ushered.

After the usual compliments, Viviani began by acquainting the duca with his friend's journey to the castello. He informed him of the conte's indisposition, which had detained him contrary to  
donna

donna Maddalena's desire. The duca was much astonished to hear this recital, and the workings of his countenance sufficiently displayed his inward displeasure; but when Viviani made him acquainted with the present unfortunate predicament of his daughter, the susceptible feelings of a parent predominated over every other sentiment, and he began to reflect on the best means of ensuring her safety. Viviani failed not to speak in behalf of his friend; he vindicated his conduct in going secretly to the castello, alleging that the conte could not endure the thought that donna Maddalena should entertain an idea, that his visit to the convent of Santa Maria had been premeditated. He then attested the conte's innocence in the strongest terms; but the duca was too much agitated by contending emotions, to pay much attention to this part of the conversation, and they soon after parted.

Viviani

Viviani returned to his hotel, and the duca instantly repaired to the convent of Santa Maria, but found it impossible to obtain an audience with the madre Bracciano. He then applied at the palace of the grand duke, with whom he was in high favour, and related the whole affair, concerning his daughter and the conte Marcello Porta, as well as the subsequent conduct of the lady abbess. He was much shocked at the recital; and when the duca Bertocci solicited his interference on the present occasion, he shook his head, assuring him that he had no power over the proceedings of the Holy Inquisition; nor did he dare to question its authority. He, nevertheless, promised the duca Bertocci, that he would personally solicit the supreme inquisitor in his favour.—“For though,” continued he, “appearances are against your daughter, yet I myself believe, from the circumstances you have related, that she will prove innocent;

nocent; and since the conte Marcello could, by divulging his secret vow, extricate himself and donna Maddalena from the dreadful charge, the rigour of the Holy Office will doubtless fall upon him—nor will they be sparing of any means that may enforce a full confession.”

On quitting the palace of the grand duke, the duca Bertocci repaired to the prison of the Inquisition. He was admitted into the presence of one of the vicars, whom he made acquainted with his name and dignity, and the desire he entertained of having an audience with his daughter. But the vicar denied all knowledge of such a person being there confined, though but a few moments had elapsed since he was summoned from her cell to the duca's presence, such being the deceptious conduct practised by that horrid tribunal!

This



This mark of duplicity, in one deputed as a minister of ecclesiastical justice, confounded the duca. Being unable to gain the least intelligence concerning Maddalena Rosa, he quitted the prison, his mind distracted with dreadful apprehensions relating to the sufferings and fate of his loved child, and returned despondently to his palace.

The most corroding anxiety preyed upon his heart, during the remainder of that day, and his mind became at night so restless, that he determined on again visiting, at all hazards, the dreary prison of the Inquisition, in the hope of finally succeeding in his attempt. Vain hope ! for they, alas ! had never felt a parent's yearnings, never known a daughter.

On his arrival at the gate of this horrid mansion, he made his business known to one of the officials, and was silently conducted to a chamber. It was the

dark abode of one of the familiars. Here the duca was left in company with two men, whose sullen appearance coincided with the gloomy residence.

“ And can these be officers of Heaven’s justice ? ” thought the duca ; “ these wretches, whose murderous looks inspire the beholder with horror and aversion ? Is this the seat of pure religion ? Does she sanction the methods here practised ? methods so contrary to all feelings of humanity, that the soul that even *thinks* of them recoils ! Is the dungeon, the torture, and the flame, to convince the poor, the deluded victim ? No, it only serves to harden him in his perverse belief ; for if, through the agonies which the rack inflicts, he perforce confesses and abjures his error, religion obtains no victory, reason no convert, and truth no follower. For he still secretly cherishes his false doctrine, and becomes only a hypocritical professor, through  
such

such violent measures, which, as they are manifestly repugnant to our reason, nature, and feelings, cannot be of divine institution."

A person now entered, who summoned the duca from the apartment.

He followed in silence, and was led through several passages, faintly illuminated by glimmering lamps, placed high on the lofty walls. He saw a door opened, at some distance, by a tall figure in the monastic habit. He caught a glimpse of his face, and instantly recognised the features of father Ubaldo. He requested permission of his guide to speak with the monk; but he received for answer a sullen look and a shake of the head. The duca cast an inquiring glance, as he passed the door which the father had entered; it was closed, and all within secured.

Silent, still he was led forward. His guide at length stopped, and desiring the duca to wait their return, instantly disappeared. The passage wherein he was left was without light. Ere a minute elapsed, he perceived, at some distance, the glare of a torch; but what was his astonishment, when he beheld the very youth who had so strangely attempted his life, traverse the extremity of the avenue, conducted by an official!

The duca, unmindful of his own situation, immediately followed him, and on gaining the end of the passage, turned to pursue the youth, who had proceeded with so quick a step, that he had now reached and entered another angle. The flambeau cast but a faint light. The duca paused: he heard a rustling noise at his side, and instantaneously found his arm violently grasped by some strange hand. He turned, and could just discern a human form, completely

pletely muffled in a long black habit. The last gleam of the receding torch, striking on the blade of the assailant's poniard, showed the duca the extreme danger of his situation. With infinite presence of mind he seized the uplifted arm that held the steel, and after a violent struggle, tore it from the ruffian's hold. He attempted to secure the assassin; but he eluded his endeavour, and in an instant fled.

The duca remained in profound silence and obscurity. He stood petrified with astonishment, and listened, in the hope of hearing the villain's receding steps; but a death-like stillness reigned around.

Suddenly his ear was assailed by a lengthened groan, proceeding from some distance; now he heard a shriek, which he knew was uttered by a female; and again a heavy groan succeeded. The

duca's imagination sickened, as his busy fancy strayed to the scene where those tortures were inflicting, that caused the sufferer's agonies.

"Merciful Heaven!" inwardly exclaimed the duca, "my own Rosa is in the hands of these unfeeling men, whose souls are steeled against all assaults of pity; who respect nor age nor sex; whose occupation is to behold the agonizing sufferings of their fellow-creatures."

He was suddenly interrupted in this train of reflection, by hearing the approach of footsteps; and immediately a voice, in a low tone, repeated—"Monsignor, where are you?"

The duca, fearful that it might be the assassin returned, drew his sword, demanding—"Whom do you seek?"

"Yourself," answered the inquisitor; "for by your voice I know you to be the duca Bertocci."

"Beware,

“Beware, then, how you approach me; for I am now guarded against your attempts,” replied he.

“Speak lower, monsignor,” returned the stranger, in a voice soft and impressive, “for I come to save you. Follow my steps at a distance, and you shall soon escape these dangerous walls.”

“No,” said the duca, “I would first behold a darling child, who lingers in a dungeon of the Holy Office, barred from a parent’s warm embrace.”

“I know that child,” continued the other; “I know the crime of which she stands accused: I also know the conte Marcello Porta; I am sincerely your friend, duca, though fatal necessity compels me to appear your enemy. I therefore entreat you to follow me hence; you cannot be admitted to donna Maddalena’s presence. I offer you life; if you remain here, you are irrevocably lost.”

The stranger proceeded along the same passage by which the duca had entered. Again he urged him to follow, for the duca continued to move cautiously after him. They soon gained the lighted avenue, when he perceived that his guide was habited in a long black tunic, the hood of which enveloped his head. He was tall of stature; and from the imperfect view the duca had of his person, his deportment was dignified and elegant.

The stranger turned his head, his right hand holding part of the cowl, so as to conceal his features.—“Do not hesitate, monsignor,” cried he, “but quicken your pace. Though I know the rectitude of my own conduct, in thus restoring you to liberty, yet I can forgive your distrust; your life has already been attempted; look upon me still as that assassin, and still keep your naked sword levelled at my person.”

The



The stranger now turned into a different passage from that which the duca had passed, on his first entrance—he made a halt.—“ This way,” said he, “ leads not to the prison-gate !”

“ And would you, monsignor, think of obtaining your liberty by returning the direct road ? You are lost for ever, unless you abandon yourself to my guidance ; for, by my soul’s best hope, ’tis I alone can free you.”

Still the duca wavered.

“ I beseech you, signor, rely on my honour,” continued his mysterious guide.—“ Did I seek your perdition, have I not the means ?—Are not you now bewildered within these darksome walls ? Are not its ministers obedient to my call ?”

“ Well, be it as you will,” cried the duca, after a moment’s pause.—“ Lead on—but should the murderer’s steel

H 5

again

again attempt my life, your own shall pay the instant forfeit of your perfidy."

He followed close upon his conductor's steps, who quickened his pace. They traversed windings, forming an endless labyrinth, and, at length, gained a chamber, the door of which was opened. The stranger entered, the duca following.

His guide then approached a large wardrobe. Taking thence a black garment, resembling his own, he presented it to the duca, and bad him instantly put it on. He complied—when, quitting the apartment, they passed along another passage, at the end of which the stranger directed the duca to conceal his sword beneath his vestment. They then descended a narrow staircase, at the bottom of which was a vaulted chamber, illuminated by a lamp, suspended from the centre; but were stopped  
ped

ped on the opposite side, by a masked official, in a most terrific habit, who suddenly uttered an enigmatical word—which his guide answering, they were permitted to pass on.

Dreadful groans now struck the duca's ear, which seemed to issue from an adjoining cell: his conductor now quickened his pace, the duca treading in his footsteps. Another minister of the Holy Office now appearing, the former mysterious method of question and reply took place, and they again passed without discovery. They continued to tread these subterraneous mazes, till his guide beginning to ascend a staircase, he was directed to throw off his disguise, as no longer necessary. His conductor then drawing from his bosom a key, unlocked a door, and opening it, bade the duca depart, who, after passing the threshold, found himself, to his infinite satisfaction, at liberty. He turned

ed to thank his deliverer, but he was instantly checked.—“ Spare yourself, my lord, the needless pain of acknowledging an obligation, where none is due. I once sought your life, now I have saved it.”

The orb of night beamed in chaste majesty. His mysterious conductor threw back the concealing tunic, and discovered to the duca’s astonished eyes, the very youth, that, in the ruined monastery, first sought his life, and then so strangely fled. He remained transfixed to the spot.

“ Now, tell me,” cried the youth, “ do I merit your thanks? I have but acted as humanity dictates : do not then lessen the retributory deed, by loading me with undeserved thanks.”

“ Oh, tell me,” cried the duca, “ who and what are you? Why do I again experience such emotion at beholding you?”

you? Why does my heart involuntarily spring towards you? Speak!—answer me, I beseech you!”

“Learn then, duca, that I am your sworn enemy. Yes, twice have I had you in my power, and twice my resolution has failed. Seek not my name—it must remain a stranger to you for ever.”

“You seem an inmate of this prison,” cried the duca: “you may yet preserve my child. Oh! pity then a fond father’s feelings, noble youth, for such I am sure thou art; alleviate the sufferings of my Maddalena!”

“Your suggestion, signor, is unfounded; I am no inhabitant of this dreadful abode. I have a soul attuned to pity, and a liberal hand to aid the wretched. Your daughter, monsignor, shall experience every assistance in my power. Farewell!”

Saying these words, he closed the door, not waiting the duca’s reply, who, viewing

viewing the lofty walls with indescribable sensations of horror, and clasping his hands with agony, quitted the gloomy pile, and proceeded to his palace, meditating on the late extraordinary events.

Shortly after his return, a servant entered his apartment with a billet, which had been delivered to the porter by an unknown person, concealed in a long cloak and hat, whose broad brims veiled his features. The duca opened it, and read as follows :—

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“ MONSIGNOR,

“ I caution you, whatever may be your feelings respecting your daughter's situation, and, notwithstanding the dreadful state of incertitude which your mind must undergo on her account, never again to attempt gaining admittance into the prisons of the Holy Office; all your efforts to accomplish an  
interview,

interview, will undoubtedly prove abortive ; therefore hazard no more your life in a fruitless effort."

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The duca Bertocci, after the perusal of this mysterious letter, which he attributed to the extraordinary youth to whom he owed his liberty, brought to his recollection the strange succession of events that had occurred during the evening, and, at a late hour, retired to rest, agitated by those painful sensations which a tender parent must necessarily experience, whose only child was thus critically situated.

## CHAP. VI.

Forms without body, and impassive air,  
The squalid spectres, that in dead of night  
Break my short sleep, and skim before my sight.

DRYDEN'S *Virgil*.

.....

“ Be thou a spirit of health, or goblin damn'd,  
Bring with thee airs from heav'n, or blasts from hell ;  
Be thy intents wicked or charitable ?

ON the officers of the Inquisition assisting Maddalena to enter the carriage, she was in a state of dreadful apprehension, and it required the greatest exertion of fortitude, to prevent her mind from sinking under the pressure of misfortune ; but reflection soon afforded her relief ; the consciousness of her innocence cheered the gloomy prospect. To the Divine Judge of all, Maddalena submitted her cause ; to heaven she looked  
up



up for support and consolation. The Omnipotent did not disdain this inward offering; he shed over her the healing balm of comfort; her soul assumed a steady composure, and, during the whole of the journey, she enjoyed a state of almost uninterrupted tranquillity.

Not so the conte Marcello; his breast was torn with agonizing passions. Now, he beheld that being, whom his soul adored, the inhabitant of a gloomy cell, without one friend to comfort or alleviate her misfortunes. Then, he pictured to himself that dread tribunal, torturing perhaps his Maddalena's lovely form, without regard to rank or modesty, to draw from her a confession of crimes of which her spotless soul was guiltless. Sometimes he recurred to the pangs of the duca, her father, and to the execrations with which his name would be loaded. The revengeful madre Vittoria, and the subtle monk Ubaldo, floated by  
turns

turns before his tortured imagination. What farther schemes were they not then plotting, to bring himself and Maddalena Rosa to the torture and the flame! for he was well assured, that death alone could satiate the revenge of the implacable madre. He, too, was the cause of all their misery. He could restore peace and happiness to the duca, and liberty to Maddalena, but did not dare to violate his sacred oath.

Such were the afflicting passions that alternately predominated over the conte's mind. On his arrival at the Inquisition, he was conducted by one of the officials into a narrow but lofty cell, illumed by one glimmering lamp, a bundle of rushes and a stool, all the furniture of the wretched abode. He inquired of his conductor whether money could procure him a more convenient cell. The stranger frowned, and was closing the door, when the conte again repeated the question,

tion, upon which the official, in a menacing tone, exclaimed—"Think you, signor conte, that this is a mansion where bribery is tolerated. You have already been guilty of sacrilegious contempt of religion, and you would now add to your crime, by bribing its ministers to a dereliction of their duty. Learn, signor, that this dungeon is a paradise, when compared with the hell you will hereafter have to endure."

He then closed the portal with violence; the bolts creaked; and he retired, muttering the words profanity and damnation.

The conte threw himself upon his rushes, and covering his face with his hand, gave way to all the horrors his situation inspired. Worn out at length, he sunk into a confused slumber. Those subjects which, waking, tormented him, haunted his wretched dreams: in them  
he

he anticipated those scenes of horror that awaited him.

Now, his fertile imagination paints the suffering Maddalena—the cords tearing her tender frame—her form pale, languid, and almost expiring—again the torture forces her back to hated life—her groans distract his soul—with anguish he awakes.

Again he slumbers—the horrid scene continues—he strives in vain to render her assistance. Now he is habited as a criminal, in the Act of Faith—he approaches the faggot—Maddalena Rosa is already chained to the stake—now the ardent flames consume her garments—her beauteous hair now blazes—her flesh is scorched—her limbs wreathed in anguish—she cries for mercy—he hears her shrieks—again he wakes—her piercing cry still vibrates in his ear.

Agonized,

Agonized, the wretched conte fixed his languid eyes upon the opposite wall, whereon the dim lamp but faintly gleamed. Horrid objects struck his sight—he started from his miserable couch, and for a moment yielded to the impulse of fear. He approached the wall, on which the most dreadful images that human fancy could invent, were portrayed, to terrify the wretched inhabitant of this earthly hell. One demon of gigantic stature seemed to roll his terrific eyes upon the conte. Hissing serpents appeared to dart forth their blood-dripping tongues, whose points were armed with streams of fire. Ghastly forms were represented in the background, and skeletons, intertwined with poisonous adders; and amongst chapless skulls, from whose eyeless sockets were issuing long wreathing worms, the speckled toad, and the death-dealing scorpion, seemed to dwell.

The

The conte turned disgusted from the sight. And is it then possible that man can thus delight to torture his fellow-creatures ! Oh religion ! canst thou behold all this, and calmly submit to have thy name thus vilified ? Yes, thy divine institutor bore with meekness and resignation his unmerited insults and persecution.

With folded arms the conte paced his dungeon ; he stopped beneath the lamp ; his eyes distinguished many characters on the wall ; he approached to examine them, and read as follows :—

“ March 12, in the year of our blessed Redeemer, 1590, J. Bendetta Cazala, of the age of seventeen, was accused of heresy, together with my mother, and Gonsalvo, a generous youth I loved. We were betrothed to each other : a powerful nobleman saw and admired me ; unable to gain my consent to his  
illicit

illicit desires, being also repulsed in his base attempts to seduce my mother from her duty, by giving me up to his licentious wishes, we were jointly accused before this tribunal, and dragged hither. the very morning that was to have given me to my adored Gonsalvo. 'Tis true, we differed in our professions of faith from our persecutors, but we, nevertheless, thought ourselves equally entitled with them to the Almighty's favour. In this dungeon I lingered

\* \* \* \* \* Oh, hear my sufferings, thou after-inhabitant of this gloomy abode. Read on, and pity me.

“ 15th—Summoned before the table of the Holy Office, and examined.

“ 21st and 25th—Again carried before the lords inquisitors.

“ June 2d—I am just able to continue my narration—

“ After my third examination, I was led to the vaults of this prison. There, without the least respect to my sex, I

was stripped of every covering. The inquisitor there present entreated me to confess and abjure my heresy. Again, as I had before done, I protested myself steadfast in my belief. The inquisitor then acquainted me that, since my obstinacy condemned me to the torture, this tribunal would be innocent if my blood was shed, or if I even expired under my torments.

“ Having said this, I was enclosed in a loose garment, which the familiars twisted so tight on either side, that I was on the point of expiring. In an instant the linen was slackened, when the sudden alteration put me to the most grievous anguish.

“ This torture finished, the admonition was repeated. I was unconscious that my differing in religion was a crime. What had I to confess ?

“ My fingers were then drawn together so tightly, with thin cords, that the blood issued from beneath my nails.

I was



I was then placed against the wall, standing on a bench. Around my body, arms, and legs, ropes were affixed, which were then passed through iron pulleys. The officials, at the signal given, drew these ropes with violence, and fixed me to the wall. Still they increased the tension, and I felt a pain as if my limbs were exposed to the action of fire. During these sufferings the bench was removed, when my own weight drawing the cords more closely into my flesh, the anguish became intolerable, and I fainted.

“ On my recovery, I found myself stretched on the stone floor. Again the inquisitor exhorted me, by the bowels of mercy, to abjure my faith. I could not answer; and if I had, it would have been to have professed myself stedfast.

“ A new torture then succeeded . . .  
 . . . . .  
 projecting points of steel . . . tor-  
 tures . . . . . violence . .  
 VOL. II. I . . . deep

. . . . . deep wounds  
 . . . excruciating . . . . .  
 lifeless on the ground. When disin-  
 tranced, I found myself stretched on my  
 bed of rushes.

“ Three nights after, I was again car-  
 ried to the same apartment; again the  
 questions were put to me; again I plead-  
 ed innocent; again fresh tortures were  
 inflicted. I was . . . . .

. . . . .  
 former wound . . . . . effusion  
 . . . blood . . . . . The sur-  
 geon who always attends . . . out  
 of . . . . . apartment . . .  
 advice was . . . continued . . .  
 . . . hazarding my life . . . . .  
 conveyed back to this dungeon . . .

. . . . .  
 Oh! thou miserable wretch, whoever  
 thou art, if yet I have not wearied thee  
 with my sad relation, read on. But  
 yester morn I attended at the Act of  
 Faith; it was the feast of San Sebastiano.

I was

I was dressed in the infamous habit of an incurable, whereon my own effigies were painted, surrounded by demons. I followed, as an arch-heretic, the cross, whose back was turned towards me, in token of my Saviour's having abandoned me. I saw my honoured mother in this infamous procession, and my much-loved Gonsalvo. The bell of the Dominican church tolled. Thither the procession slowly proceeded.

“ On our entrance, a friar, in a long harangue, explained the doctrine of the Catholic faith. We were afterwards carried to the place of execution. I saw my mother burnt ; I heard her piercing shrieks, and my soul sickened at the sight. My love, my Gonsalvo, was next bound to the stake ; he called on me, and blessed my name. I heard him loudly supplicate Heaven to assist me. I sunk senseless on the spot, not doubting but I should be the next to suffer ; but it pleased the Omniscient to prolong

my trials, and I bowed my heart submissively to his will; for, on awaking from my swoon, I again found myself in this cell.

“ I was visited by a monk, who exhorted me to repent. He told me that a powerful nobleman had saved my life, and named my mother’s and my lover’s murderer. More firmly than before I adhered to my tenets, and was soon left to my meditations.

“ Three tedious months are elapsed; but, praised be the Lord, my hour at length approaches.

“ To-morrow is an act of faith performed: ’tis now past midnight. The jailer has just delivered me, as before, the infamous habit with which I have again clothed myself. Once more I hear the heavy bell of the Dominicans toll. My fate is now irrevocably fixed—I go to meet my mother and my Gonsalvo. Notwithstanding my situation, I have slept; and now methinks ’tis morning.

ing. Hark ! I hear the officials approach—they loosen the bolts of my prison door : pity me, wretched reader : farewell ! if thou hast a tear to spare, shed it for the innocent Bendetta's fate——”

Under this writing, which appeared to have been in parts purposely obliterated, was the following, in large letters :—

“ By order of the supreme inquisitor, the above relation is suffered to remain. The condemned therein confesses her heresy ; it is therefore to show the rigour of the Holy Office to those who may hereafter inhabit this cell, and teach them not to persist in their contumacy, like Bendetta Cazzala ; by this, they may also learn the lenity of this holy tribunal, in affording her so much time, and giving her such repeated opportunities of repentance.”

The wretched Bendetta's recital had awakened the conte's tender feelings; but on reading the subsequent lines, horror and rage, at the cool barbarity of this office, occupied his breast: he execrated the perpetrators of such detested cruelty, and, for a moment, wavered in his belief of the beneficence of his own religion, which could cherish in its bosom such diabolical tenets. His thoughts then revolved to Bendetta's story—he again returned to the latter part that spoke so pathetically to his feelings; he wept—they were the tears of commiseration; nor did he think they dishonoured the manly cheek.—“Poor Bendetta! murdered innocent!” exclaimed he, “thou hast appealed to one who, in the midst of his own misfortunes, can pity thee—who has yet a tear and sympathetic sigh for thine unmerited afflictions! Perhaps,” continued the conte, “thou wert beautiful as my Maddalena: thy fortitude, at least, equals that of ancient heroines;

roines ; and is there, in this horrid abode, a creature bearing man's form, so hard of heart, so lost to every tender sentiment, that could brutally lacerate my tender Rosa's frame? Yes, for there were wretches who beheld thy sufferings, Bendetta !—but, sweet innocent, thou art now at rest.”

A hollow groan at that moment struck the conte's ear. Turning, he fixed his gaze upon the figure of the tall demon delineated on the wall. He started ; it was no delusion—its terrible eyes were seen to roll.

At that instant the groan was again repeated, followed by these words, uttered in a plaintive female voice—  
“ Bendetta comes !”

This was followed by the sound of measured footsteps. The conte indistinctly heard the toll of a bell.

“ Yes,” continued the same sepulchral voice, “ Bendetta obeys the bell of the Dominicans ! her unhallowed spirit wanders amidst the scene of her earthly miseries.”

Suddenly the conte started ; a female form appeared at the end of the dungeon—it slowly approached towards the lamp, and, uttering a heavy sigh, with horrific tone continued—“ Oh ! had I but abjured my heresy, my soul had been at peace !”

The figure then paced forwards—the light became extinct—a dreadful crash was heard—red flames issued from the eyes of the demon—and the serpents appeared covered with a blue lambent flame, that reflected a deadly gleam upon the dungeon. The female form stood before him ; it had once been beautiful, but a ghastly hue now overspread its meagre countenance. It was enveloped  
in



in a fiery garment, which loosely hung on her emaciated frame. It now moved towards the demon—when the wall yawned wide, and the dreadful spectre disappeared.

The lamp was again suddenly illumined, and every thing in the cell wore its former appearance.

The conte remained motionless for a considerable time ; he at length turned his glance upon the hideous figure, but its eyes had no longer any motion.

Assuming more composure, he proceeded to the farther end of the dungeon ; but could perceive no entrance, for on all sides the same massive wall appeared. He advanced towards the representation of the demon ; he could not refrain from shuddering at its terrific aspect ; he was not tall enough to examine the face minutely—he drew the

small bench towards the spot—it was but a painting!

“ Yet,” cried the conte, “ I perceived the eyes distinctly move.”

He struck that part of the wall with violence ; it appeared equally solid with the rest of the chamber. He descended, and again carefully examined every part of the cell, without the wished-for success. He threw himself upon his bed of rushes, and, worn out with mental anguish, again sunk to rest, his confused dreams still bringing to his fancy the form of her his soul adored.

On Maddalena Rosa's alighting from the carriage, within the gates of the prison of the Inquisition, she was silently conducted through various passages, and, at length, gained the cell destined for her confinement. It was, in its construction, similar to that in which the  
conte

conte was a prisoner. But the walls exhibited not the same dreadful images. Her conductor closed the door and left her.

She gazed with calmness on this abode of misery, for her pure soul was lifted towards its Maker. She paced for some time the dungeon, and then drew from her bosom Marietta's golden cross: she kissed it. Her fair form, compared with the gloomy scene around her, appeared as snow upon a raven's back; or like some bright seraph, slowly moving on the dusky wings of night. She dropped on her knee.—“How true thy bodings, my loved friend! Thy Madalena must indeed experience dreadful trials; but she will sustain them with fortitude. She will look up to that beneficent Being, who is the pure source of every virtue. Before thy mercy seat I raise my hands, and offer up my fervent supplications. They will reach

thine ear; for they flow spontaneous from the soul. Withdraw not thy strengthening hand from me; let *thy* powerful shield still ward the arrow of adversity; for I confess the frailty of my nature and my sex—a poor, forlorn, and helpless creature—a vessel in a troubled sea, without a pilot to direct its course, if thou withholdest thy guiding hand. Continue then to let the gentle dew of thy mercy distil upon me. Receive the full sacrifice of a glowing heart, that burns with adoration of thy holy name. Yes, I feel that in this cell, thou still art with me; for I can fancy this glimmering lamp the noontide sun — these gloomy walls a boundless horizon, and the damp air the fanning zephyrs of the morn; for my mind is lulled in the cradle of contentment, and can the monarch enjoy more? Will the sumptuous palace ensure greater happiness to the possessor, than this dungeon to the prisoner ‘trebly armed’ with conscious innocence?

nocence? who sits and views the spider weave his silken web, and, in the contemplation of this little insect, pleased, exclaims—‘ He who provides for a creature apparently so worthless, will, doubtless, beneficently exert His providential care for me.’”

Maddalena rose; again she kissed the cross, and then reposed it on her tranquil bosom, where it appeared like the first saffron streak of Aurora, tinging a milk-white cloud. She threw herself upon her rush couch, sighing forth the conte’s name.

She continued several hours in a delightful trance—pleasing it was. Her dreams were of heaven! but if perchance her visionary fancy wandered to earthly scenes, they were of her father, who, she fancied, smiled upon her, or of the youth she loved.

Awaking,

Awaking, at length, she raised her eyes and started. The monk Ubaldo, with folded arms, stood at her side.

As man's destroyer, with malignant smile, gazed on the sleeping Eve, so he beheld, unmoved, the blooming flower, which, through his treachery, was doomed to be crushed for ever.

The monk could no longer bear the sight of her angelic countenance; he turned from her to quit the cell—he bit his lip, and sullenly exclaimed—“And is it then possible—can innocence indulge such repose, even in a dungeon of the Inquisition?”

Maddalena had by this time arisen; she approached the monk—she caught his garment—he turned his head—her radiant eyes beamed full upon his gloomy countenance. What a contrast! a  
pitying

pitying angel gazing on a remorseless hell-born demon !

“ Yes, padre,” exclaimed Maddalena, “ virtue can smile, even at the grim spectre Death.”

The monk’s fierce eyes glared horribly upon her.

“ The virtuous mind will never shrink at a weak mortal’s frown.”

As she pronounced these last words, she gradually raised her hand pointing to heaven. The monk followed her motion with his eyes—the inward workings of his soul were scorpion’s stings, and he again quickly bent them to the earth.

“ You judge rightly, father,” continued Maddalena, “ I am innocent ; your unguarded exclamation proves you conscious

scious of the fact, notwithstanding I behold in you one of my accusers. Oh, father, as you would cherish your soul's welfare in the world to come, as you hope for your Redeemer's pardon, play not a second Judas's part ! It is not so much for my own life that I now plead —'tis for your own salvation."

Maddalena gradually dropped on her knee. The monk, confused, turned his guilty visage towards the door of the cell ; he endeavoured to extricate his robe from her grasp, but she withheld him. How strong is the arm of virtue ! how powerless the attempts of vice !

" Yet you shall hear me, father," cried Maddalena.

The monk was compelled to raise his right hand to his face, in order to conceal the strong emotions which his labouring soul thereon portrayed.

" Ah !



“ Ah ! wherefore do you thus attempt to fly a helpless creature, who threatens not with torture or with flame, but whose weapon is the gentle and persuasive voice of truth ? Consider your habit, father ; you are a professed of the monastery of Santa Croce : in what light must you appear in HIS eyes who suffered for our transgressions ? ”

Ubaldo again attempted to quit the dungeon. Maddalena’s words had pierced his flinty bosom—remorse had deeply stung his soul.

“ Yet, father—yet a moment hear me.”

At that instant the door of the dungeon was thrown open, and one of the inquisitors entered. He darted a malignant smile on the supplicating angel, and then, turning to the monk, exclaimed—“ Have you, padre, touched her  
her

her with contrition? Does she confess her soul's guilt? And will she by penitence strive to merit Heaven's forgiveness?"

Ubaldo had now in part recovered his wonted hypocrisy. The villain shook his head in the negative.

"She has, doubtless, then endeavoured to soften you to her purpose," continued the inquisitor, in a more exalted tone.

"She has," returned the monk, after a moment's pause. His words were accompanied with a death-dooming look at Maddalena. "But I am steeled against her insinuating arts, and rigidly will I pursue my duty."

Maddalena, in horror, turned her face from his countenance, where servile fear and hellish malice sat. The monk's last sentence proved the depravedness of his nature,

nature, and she would rather have gazed on Cetæ's daughters, or the hateful Basilisk, than again turned her eyes on the hypocritical countenance of the base monk Ubaldo.

“ And did you dare insult this holy man ?” cried the inquisitor. “ Could you harbour a thought so derogatory to his stern virtue, as to imagine that he would for a moment listen to your insidious argument ? You heap crime on crime ; but the Holy Office shall take cognisance of this proof of your hardened guilt.”

“ My guilt !” reiterated Maddalena.

“ Yes, thine,” returned the officer, in a voice of thunder.

The padre Ubaldo then left the cell, followed by the inquisitor. The door closed, and Maddalena was left to the indulgence of her own thoughts.—

“ Go, miserable wretch !” said she,  
“ thy

“ thy villainy may flourish for a season ; but the rod of correction will one day overtake thee. I would have turned thy wayward steps—I would have compassionated thy faults—thou shouldst have reentered the path of virtue—and thy soul should have been at peace in the bosom of thy Maker ; for, if the lineaments of that countenance portray the mind, Ubaldo needs repentance.”

Maddalena for some time indulged these reflections. Again she heard the bolts of her cell withdrawn ; a stranger entered, whose person was covered with a long black habit, the cowl of which concealed his visage. He closed the door of the dungeon after him.—“ Donna Rosa,” said he, in a gentle tone, “ I am come to comfort you.”

“ Whoe’er you are,” returned Maddalena, “ do not deride me ; for well I know that every charitable idea is exploded from this dreadful abode. What  
comfort

comfort then can you impart, whose habit bespeaks you an inmate of this mansion?"

"And is pity then incompatible with every person within these walls?" returned the stranger, in an impressive voice; "surely there may be some who voluntarily become the inhabitants of a prison, to pour the balm of consolation on the wounded spirit; and such a one I trust now stands before you."

The stranger approached—he took Maddalena's hand—there was something in his manner that strangely interested her in his favour.—"I know," continued he, "the crime wherewith you stand accused. From my soul I pity you; may you prove innocent as your looks bespeak you! A fond father's anguish will be then assuaged—he will once more clasp you to his throbbing bosom—his mind will be at rest."

Maddalena

Maddalena felt a tear bedew that hand the stranger held.

“And do you then know my father?” cried Maddalena, in a tremulous voice.

“Yes, yes, I know him well.” He quitted Maddalena, and traversed the cell in seeming agitation.

“Have you then seen him of late?” said she. Her voice faltered — her heart was full, and tears found vent.

“It is scarce three hours since I parted from him. He entreated that I would alleviate your sorrows. I promised, and it shall be my constant care to sympathize with them.”

“Tell me, kind stranger,” said Maddalena, “for I cannot doubt your sincerity, does he believe me innocent? Does he continue his affection for his Rosa?”

“From his apparent feelings, you are as dear to him as ever,” said the stranger.

She

She felt an inexpressible tremor whenever he spoke. He continued to pace the dungeon with disorderly step. Now he stopped; it was opposite the light. Maddalena raised her eyes to observe him, and perceived beneath the cowl a handsome youthful countenance.

“What can portend this inward agitation?” exclaimed the stranger.

Maddalena might have uttered a similar exclamation; for the transient view which she caught of his features interested her singularly in his behalf.

Approaching, he again gently took her hand.—“Innocent Maddalena!” said he, “for such my soul tells me thou art, I will hover round thee in this abode of wretchedness. I will, to the utmost of my ability, strive to serve you: neither shall the conte Marcello pine unremembered by me.”

He

He dropped her hand and proceeded to the door of the cell. Again he turned towards her, and gracefully waving his hand, disappeared.



## CHAP. VII.

—————Satan then  
Each perturbation smooth'd with outward calm ;  
Artificer of fraud ! and was the first  
That practis'd falsehood under saintly show,  
Deep malice to conceal, couch'd with revenge.

MILTON.

.....

Quoi ! sur un beau semblant de ferveur si touchante  
Cacher un cœur si double, une ame si méchante ?

MOLIERE.

As soon as Maddalena Rosa quitted the convent of Santa Maria, Giacinta hastened to her chamber, to indulge her grief in private. 'Twas there she lamented Maddalena's loss—'twas there that, in the bitterness of sorrow, she arraigned the will of Providence, that had thus momentarily given her a friend, only to mock her wretchedness.—“ Yes, they

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have torn her from me—she that would have pitied my sufferings, whose sympathizing heart would have soothed my care-worn breast! What crime can be alleged against her? Who can be so base as to arraign her conduct? She is innocent as the sleeping babe, that, like a seraph, smiles, and on its coral lips receives the enraptured stamp of virtue: she is incapable of deceit—that breast is free from guile!”

Such were the reflections that wholly occupied Giacinta, till the matin-bell summoned her to prayers, and she descended into the grated chamber.

The plaintive notes of the sisterhood touched her pensive soul: the translucent veil of sorrow dimmed her eyes—her swelling heart seemed bursting from her bosom. Tears soon found a passage—they coursed each other down her lovely cheek, and she found relief.

She

She attended the sisterhood into the refectory, and sparingly partook of the repast, during which the madre Vittoria entered. An unusual air of austerity sat on her countenance; the nuns were surprised—this was a most extraordinary condescension. She soon inquired of sister Beatrice who was the boarder that had followed Maddalena Rosa into the parlour the preceding night, and prevented her for some time from quitting the sacred mansion, which her presence had so much disgraced.

The nun immediately mentioned Giacinta's name.

The madre looked angrily upon her, and thus addressed her—"You have been guilty, Giacinta, of a most flagrant misdemeanour. Had not Maddalena Rosa proved herself unworthy of this community, she would not have been dismissed its sacred walls for ever: her

crime merited the most rigorous punishment that my insulted dignity could suggest; but it was degrading to the superior of the sisterhood of Santa Maria to assume the office of a chastiser; she will therefore deliver her into the hands of those, whose place it is to inflict ecclesiastical punishments. You are guilty, Giacinta, of a double offence; first, in remaining in the chamber, after sister Beatrice's express order to the contrary; and, secondly, in holding converse with Maddalena Rosa, whose presence here was adjudged dangerous, and tending to contaminate the chaste minds of the sisterhood. Your punishment, notwithstanding, shall be partially remitted, as you are but newly an inhabitant of this convent."

The madre then explained to the nuns the dreadful offence of which she pretended Maddalena had been guilty,  
when

when an exclamation of surprise and horror burst from most of her auditors.

“ Yes,” repeated the abbess, “ such is the character of her, whom religion has cherished in her bosom—one, who has admitted, even at the solemn hour of night, a man, to profane our sacred mansion. But we have to thank the holy father Ubaldo; for, to his pious care we owe the discovery of this detested scene of depravity.”

The madre continued this harangue for a considerable time, loading the absent Maddalena with the most opprobrious epithets, and vilifying the conte's name with such warmth of temper and bitter invectives, that, had any one present harboured a doubt, as to the truth of the accusation, they must have suspected the abbess being in some measure concerned.

She at length quitted the refectory, and the nuns and boarders retired to their various occupations, while sister Giacinta proceeded into the convent garden, and there the first words she uttered were—"Can Maddalena Rosa be guilty? My mind forbids the thought—wherefore do I then question the integrity of her actions?"

The accusation against her was so plausible, that it even staggered Giacinta in her belief.—"To be found at that hour, in company with a man, by the madre herself, and the monk Ubaldo, I know not what conclusion to draw."—She stood musing for a considerable time, and at length exclaimed—"But why was the padre himself here at such an unusual hour? His presence was not required at this convent. There was no sick nun, who needed her confessor. Besides, the strict rules of a monastery enjoin, that no one shall be admitted

mitted after the vesper-bell, but a father, and then, necessity should require his presence. He was absent, too, from his own convent, where his duty called him."

Giacinta then recurred to the whole of the abbess's conversation. She brought to her recollection every word and gesture, whence she inferred that the madre herself must be in some measure concerned. Yet, how, appeared to her a mystery. The result of her reflections were, that Maddalena Rosa was guiltless, and she joyfully exclaimed—"The dictates of my soul were just; my friend is innocent."

In the mean time, the madre retired to her chamber, the demon, Jealousy, more fiercely rankling in her bosom, where she was, shortly after, joined by the monk Ubaldo. She suggested several plans; but it was at length agreed between them, that the conte and Mad-

dalena should be instantly accused before the table of the Holy Office.

The monk had powerful reasons for wishing this step to be carried into execution. He immediately drew up in writing the whole of the accusations, that, when examined separately, their answers might precisely correspond. Sister Beatrice was also admitted into their presence, being acquainted with the secret; as it was no other than herself who had conducted the conte into the chamber, when left by the monk in the gallery. The abbess well knew how much she was attached to her interest; besides, it would have been difficult to conceal from her the truth. She was the chosen favourite, and consequently but seldom out of the madre's presence. To her, therefore, the monk administered the most horrid oath of secresy; and she swore, and bound herself by that solemn tie, to adhere to the madre's  
cause,



cause, and, if required, appear in her behalf.

Thus secure in this plan of villainy, the monk repaired to the palace of the grand inquisitor, before whom he laid this false accusation. The apparent crime called for the utmost rigour of the Holy Office. The grand inquisitor, having taken the monk's deposition, dispatched one of the vicars of the tribunal, who, having examined the madre Bracciano, returned with her answers in writing. They coincided exactly with the padre's allegations. Officials were immediately set to watch the movements of the conte Marcello; they traced him from his palace to the Castello de Valdarno, and returned to give information to the inquisitors, when their warrants against Maddalena Rosa and the conte were issued, and the parties proceeded against in the manner previously related.

The day after the conte and Madalena were arrested, sister Beatrice received a packet, the contents of which she carefully concealed from the lady abbess and every inmate of the convent. Suddenly, a considerable alteration took place in her manner—her conversations with the sisterhood were more frequent and less austere. If her eyes met those of Giacinta, she would smile, and seem pointed in her attentions to her.

One morning, in particular, she was late in her attendance at mass. As Giacinta passed sister Beatrice, she whispered her to be under no apprehension, for she would conceal her remissness from the lady abbess; and at the conclusion of the service, Giacinta descended into the garden, to take her usual walk. She endeavoured to account for this change in the nun's behaviour to the sisterhood, but more particularly to herself;

herself; and while thus occupied, she heard approaching footsteps, when, turning, it was sister Beatrice, who, with a smiling countenance, advanced towards her.

Giacinta, though possessing an open and unsuspecting mind, could not reconcile this sudden alteration in the nun's conduct, with the ideas she had already formed of her character. There was something in her manner, which always led to a suspicion that interest was the spring of her actions.

“ My dear Giacinta,” exclaimed the nun, as she approached, “ how I rejoice in having screened you from the madre's displeasure! It shall for the future be my study to cultivate your good opinion. How happy shall I esteem myself in titling you my friend !”

Giacinta bowed her head, and remained silent.

Beatrice thus continued :—" Circumstances have obliged me, contrary to my own inclination, to assume an air of reserve, which must have been construed by some into a sullenness of temper; but I am the superior's favourite, and often compelled by necessity to act in direct opposition to the real dictates of my heart. I have long wished to apologize for my conduct towards you, on the night when poor Maddalena Rosa left the convent; but as the portress had disappeared the very morning she was discovered with the conte, the madre immediately bestowed her situation on a lay sister, who was without the door of the parlour, and consequently overheard all that passed between yourself and Maddalena. Had I not, therefore, been acquainted by our superior with that circumstance, she would, to gain

gain the madre's esteem, doubtless have communicated the affair, and I should, for my remissness, have suffered her severe resentment. No sister was, I am convinced, more attached to the unfortunate Maddalena than myself."

Giacinta, at that moment, recollected her friend's words—" *This is not the first time, Beatrice, that I have experienced your kindness.*"

She fixed her eyes on the sister's countenance, but no alteration was visible.

" I must confess," said Giacinta, with an ironical smile, " that, during my short acquaintance with Maddalena Rosa, she never mentioned you among the number of her friends."

Beatrice seemed not to notice the remark, but continued.—" It was certainly a most flagrant misdemeanour ; and yet, I cannot but think our superior has  
been

been over-rigid. She should have allowed for the various faults incidental to human nature. We are none of us free from error; even when we are subject to the least temptation, we have yet our failings. A monastic life does not altogether purify our minds; yet we enjoy an uninterrupted state of tranquil happiness; we are not disturbed by those violent contending passions that agitate, and, for the most part, destroy the happiness of those who pass their lives in the tumultuous world. Our love concentrates in the adoration we pay to our blessed and immaculate patroness, whose mediation we unceasingly solicit on behalf of our immortal part; but, to what purpose do mankind convert that glorious feeling into a selfish passion—the most unholy into an impure desire of earthly pleasures, which are transient, and only tend to draw them from religion, and the veneration which is alone due to the Supreme Creator? In this  
convent

convent we live in sisterly friendship—our wishes are the same ; if we converse, our theme is heaven ; and we experience a more than mortal joy, when we look back to that vow which has banished from us every temptation.”

“ It is that thought,” returned Giacinta, “ that would damp my happiness ; for they must, doubtless, be more acceptable to the Almighty, who experience all the temptations of public life, and yet perform its several duties.”

“ If such is your opinion,” returned Beatrice, “ wherefore did you seek refuge in this convent ? why have you, in the bloom of youth, with a strong understanding, and every faculty unimpaired, quitted that world, where you might have obtained a glorious victory ?”

“ Think not that I have coward-like fled the danger,” returned Giacinta ; “ though young, I have undergone many vicissitudes, and experienced temptations, which I have resisted ; and although

though oppressed by misfortune, I have not sunk beneath its pressure. I have been pursued with enmity by the world, and it is that persecution which has driven me to seek shelter within these walls. In such a case, the monastery is to the harassed soul like the port to the wave-beaten vessel, or the first dawn of day to the weary and bewildered traveller."

"You will, doubtless, then during life," said Beatrice, "make these walls the boundaries of your happiness. We shall, ere long, embrace you as a sister. How my heart will spring towards you, when the sacred veil, encircling your sweet form, will title you one of Our Lady's purest votaries! It is to you, whose breast has felt affliction's barbed arrow; to you, whose mind yet bleeds, that religion will be most acceptable—it will act like balm to your wounds—the soft dew of heaven will heal the troubles of your soul for ever."

Sad



Sad recollection brought tears to Giacinta's eyes. She raised them to the azure heaven, which in colour they resembled; the translucent drops trickled fast down her cheek, and now they trembled upon her glowing bosom, like morning dew upon the milk-tinctured lily.

Beatrice saw the conflict in Giacinta's breast, and rejoiced to find that her description of religion had produced the effect she wished. — "Be comforted, sweet sister," said she, "for by that name from henceforth I will call you; soon will your tears be dried, your sorrows hushed for ever."

Giacinta was unable to speak; she hastily quitted the nun, and gaining her chamber, indulged, unrestrained, all the luxury of sorrow. Beatrice had beheld the scene unmoved. Joy predominated over every other passion; again she  
drew

drew from her bosom the packet which had caused such a change in her conduct; eagerly she perused the lines, then in transport pressed the paper to her lips, and retiring to her cell, ruminated on the scheme she was about to put into execution.

## CHAP. VIII.

A dreadful din was wont  
To grate the sense, when enter'd here, from groans  
And howls of slaves condemn'd, from clink of chains,  
And crush of rusty bars, and creaking hinges :  
And ever and anon the fight was dash'd  
With frightful faces, and the meagre looks  
Of grim and ghastly executioners.      CONGREVE.

ON Gerardo's quitting the hotel of signor Viviani, he immediately hastened to the palace of Marcello Porta. All the domestics were, at first, overjoyed on his return ; but when they began to question him concerning their master, he advanced slowly to a seat, threw down his whip, and, joining his hands, remained like a statue, with eyes bent to the earth.

The servants were all astonished at  
this

this behaviour, and, after silently observing him for some time, stared with open mouths at each other. One of them at length approached Gerardo, and taking his arm, shook it lustily, to rouse him from his lethargy. Again they eagerly inquired after the conte.

The faithful fellow raised his eyes, from which the tears gushed forth plentifully, and, with a bitter sigh, he exclaimed—"We shall never see him again—he is lost to the world for ever!"

He then related, at intervals, the dreadful truth. At the name of the Inquisition, they all turned pale, and with Gerardo cried aloud—"Our dear master is, indeed, lost for ever!"

Signor Viviani, shortly after his return from the Bertocci palace, repaired to the prison of the Holy Office, and making known his name, requested permission

mission to be admitted to the conte's presence. But the same duplicity was practised towards him, as the duca Bertocci had experienced, on inquiring after his daughter, they denying all knowledge of the conte Marcello, and confidently asserting that no such person was then a prisoner in the Inquisition.

With this evasive answer he was compelled to appear satisfied. But, notwithstanding the repulse, he again applied for admission the following morning, asserting his knowledge of his friend's apprehension. He received for answer, that his information was false; but that, if even the conte was a prisoner, did he imagine any one would be suffered to hold converse with him?

Viviani was finally informed, that if he again had the temerity to visit the prison, he should for his trouble make one of its dungeons his abode for some time ;

time; and was thus compelled to relinquish every attempt of seeing the conte, and submit with patience to the dreadful uncertainty which his mind experienced on his friend's account.

The conte was roused from his visions by hearing the heavy bars of his dungeon withdrawn.

The gaoler shortly after entered, accompanied by two officials in black habits, one of whom, in a loud voice, exclaimed—"Arise, Marcello Porta; we come to conduct you from this cell, dark as your own mind, to that divine sun that may enlighten you."

He quitted his bed of rushes, when the official ordered him to bare his feet, head, and arms. Resistance was useless; the conte therefore complied in silence.

With folded arms and a firm step, he  
proceeded

proceeded along the avenue, the officials walking on either side of him. They traversed several passages, faintly illuminated by glimmering lamps.

The conte's ear was frequently struck with heavy groans that issued from adjoining cells. They caused varied sensations in his breast, but that of pity for the lingering captives predominated. At length the officials halted at a door, where he was commanded to kneel, and one of his conductors, in an audible voice, then repeated the following words—"By the bowels of mercy, we conjure you, most holy lords, that you admit a sinner into your sacred presence, who, bare-footed, and on his knees, in token of contrition, begs that he may confess his wickedness, which merits eternal damnation, and thereby hope for mercy."

A voice from within answered in these words—"We would enlighten  
and

and bring into the bosom of holy church all true penitents: may the culprit without seek grace at our hands.”

The door was then thrown open, when the conte beheld a spacious and lofty apartment, illuminated by one large lamp, suspended from the centre. The wainscot was of dark brown chestnut. In the middle of each panel was painted a broad cross of scarlet, over which were the words—“*Misericordia et Justitia.*” At the further end of the chamber was placed a crucifix, raised nearly to the ceiling, the sculptured figure of our Redeemer being larger than life. In the middle was a table overspread with black velvet, on which were embroidered numerous crosses in red silk. At the end of this, directly opposite to the crucifix, was seated on a chair, elevated by two steps, the inquisitor-general.

He



He was habited in black vestments, made similar to those of the monks of the Dominican order. On his breast was embroidered a large red cross. He wore a square black cap, to the crown whereof was attached a tassel of crimson silk. On his left side were seated four inquisitors, in every respect resembling the former, except their having no cross on the breast, and a bunch of black, instead of purple silk on their caps. At the opposite end of the table, near the crucifix, sat the secretary of the Holy Office.

The familiars, who had conducted the conte, first entered the chamber, and after making the most profound reverence to the lords inquisitors, retired. He was himself then ordered to approach. An awful silence for some moments succeeded. The secretary slowly advanced towards the conte, bearing a missal, whereon he was de-

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sired to lay his left hand, and place the right upon his breast.

“Swear,” cried the grand inquisitor, in a solemn tone, “that you will answer truly every interrogatory, and never reveal any of the mysteries practised in this tribunal.”

The conte, as he took the oath, shuddered at the recollection of that vow, which had doomed himself and Maddalena to misery, and perhaps to death.

He was then desired to seat himself on a small selette, placed at the right hand of the inquisitor-general, who thus addressed him—“You, Marcello Porta, are arraigned of grievous crimes. Know you aught of the tribunal before which you now appear?”

“This is the table of the Holy Office,” returned the conte; “and you are the  
the

the lords inquisitors, whose function it is to judge all matters relative to religion."

"We are deputed," returned the inquisitor, "to extirpate heresy, and punish with rigour every offence against the Holy Catholic Faith; but we are lenient to those who willingly confess their errors, who show unfeigned signs of contrition, and throw themselves upon our mercy. May you, Marcello Porta, who now appear before us, be endowed with a pliant mind, thereby to merit our pardon and absolution. Now tell me, Marcello Porta, know you aught of the crime of which you stand charged, or of your accusers?"

"Yes," returned the conte, "the madre Vittoria Bracciano, superior of the sisterhood of Santa Maria, and one padre Ubaldo, of the monastery of Santa Croce, are the informants. By them it is alleged, that I forcibly gained admittance into the said convent of

Santa Maria, to converse with one of its boarders."

"If such you know to be the charge, on what grounds was it alleged against you?"

"I was discovered," resumed the conte, "by the said monk Ubaldo and the superior, in conversation with one of the boarders."

"You then avow the crime in its full extent," returned the inquisitor, "and plead guilty?"

"I confess," replied the conte, "that I was discovered in a chamber of the convent, with one Maddalena Rosa; but I deny that I had any evil design, or that I entered the monastery with intent to meet that boarder."

"How then came you in her company?"

"I was on the point of quitting the convent, but in the darkness of the night, mistook the door which would have conducted me without the walls.

I moved



nastery, was not with the design of conversing with Maddalena Rosa; neither was she concerned in admitting you?"

"I solemnly declare," replied the conte, "that she is guiltless of any such accusation, and that Maddalena was not the cause of my visit to the convent."

"What led you there? And who gave you admittance?" returned the inquisitor.

To this question the conte remained silent.

"Did you hear the interrogatory, Marcello Porta?"

It was again repeated in a peremptory tone.

"I am bound," said the conte, in a firm voice, "by the most solemn oath,  
never

never to reveal the cause and manner of my admission."

"What was the tenor of your oath?"

"I swore eternal secrecy, in the name of God, his blessed Son, and the immaculate Virgin."

The inquisitors looked at each other, and then frowned upon the conte. A motion was made to the secretary, who advanced, bearing a folio volume, containing the statutes of the Holy Office. It was placed before the grand inquisitor, who, turning to a certain page, read aloud as follows:—"And it was further decreed, in a council held at Rome, under our most divine apostolic father, Pope Gregory the Ninth, founder of our Holy Inquisition, at Florence, that the said inquisitors have power to annul any oath, whereby either the informant or prisoner may have bound themselves."

The book was closed, and again delivered into the hands of the secretary.

“We, therefore,” continued the inquisitor, “absolve you, Marcello Porta, from your vow, and charge you to confess the truth.”

Again the conte was silent.

“Know you the tortures which await those who obstinately persist in their contumacy?”

“I am not unacquainted,” said the conte, “with the rigorous institutions of this tribunal. Yet, though I could free myself, and her whose preservation is dearer to me than life, by an avowal of the truth, I must, in honour, conceal the secret; for, in my opinion, no power whatsoever can absolve me from my oath.”

The inquisitor-general, rising from his seat, exclaimed, with vehemence—“And have



have you then the daring effrontery to question the infallibility of the apostolical see? Is not our holy father Christ's vicar on earth? and consequently, his ordinances proceed from the Most High?"

"Most reverend lords, I am of the Catholic persuasion," returned the conte; "I have ever adhered to its doctrines, and will die steadfast in the true belief. Yet, my conscience revolts at this breach of faith. I am prepared for the tortures; they shall not draw the secret from me: all I request is, mercy towards the innocent sharer of my imprisonment."

One of the inquisitors, whose appearance was horribly terrific, and whose scowling eye had been rivetted on the conte's features, during these interrogations, answered, in a tone of voice that seemed to issue from the caverns of death—"As you, Marcello, consult the welfare of your own soul, even so shall

we show mercy to the guilty partner of your sacrilegious crime."

A malicious smile accompanied these words; but it was momentary, for his features soon resumed their wonted character.

A gloomy silence for some minutes succeeded, during which the conte experienced the most dreadful sensations. The last sentence he had heard, convinced him that no entreaties would tend to mitigate the rigour of the inquisitors towards the injured Maddalena Rosa. He was well convinced that they would inflict on her their tortures, to draw forth a secret with which she was totally unacquainted. This suggestion agitated his mind to such a degree, that he with difficulty restrained himself. The dreadful aspect of the inquisitor who had last addressed him, contributed to heighten his mental anguish; for, in  
his

his countenance, the marks of cruelty, malice, and revenge, were plainly discernible.

His visage was long, thin, and cadaverous—his wide and projecting forehead partly shaded with hair of the raven dye—his bushy brows hung lowering over two hollow eyes, that added to an appearance of cunning and deceit, a peculiar air of stern ferocity—his nose was aquiline—his mouth large, and beneath the nether lip was a tuft of short, black, bristly hair, that filled the hollow of his chin. Deep furrows marked his sunk cheek, through which his sharp bones projected. The dark workings of his mind were at times discernible, when a hectic tinge would suffuse his countenance, that resembled the glow of evening, striking full upon a tree seared by the autumnal blast.

The grand inquisitor, at length, ad-  
L 6 dressed

dressed the conte, as follows:—"By your words, Marcello Porta, it appears that you will not discover a truth, which, you allege, would free yourself and Maddalena Rosa. You confess the leading feature of the crime where-with you stand charged. You name your accusers, and yet bring no proof of their having cause of enmity against you, by which they might be maliciously induced to plot your ruin. It therefore more strongly adds to a conviction of your guilt, and the truth of the accusation laid before us. We therefore beseech you to revolve in your mind the consequences which must necessarily result, from your obstinately withholding the secret."

"I am well aware," replied the conte, "that there is cause of animosity against me, and, for that reason, my life is sought."

"Name, then, the *cause*, and the person or persons who may harbour such  
implacable

implacable hatred," said that inquisitor whose appearance had inspired the conte with such horror.

"I cannot; they are connected with my oath; my lips must for ever conceal their names."

He was again conjured, but remained steadfast to his vow of secrecy; after which a silence ensued, and every eye was fixed on his countenance.

A motion was then made to the secretary, who approached with a paper, on which he had noted every interrogatory, and the conte's respective answers. He presented it to the grand inquisitor, who, having slightly run it over, placed it on the table. The conte was then ordered to approach, and peruse its contents.

"You are satisfied, Marcello, that those are precisely your answers?"

The

The conte bowed his head in token of assent.

“We command,” continued the inquisitor, “that you thereto subscribe your name.”

He obeyed the order, without hesitation.

“You came into our presence, filled with a wicked and perverse spirit; we have used our endeavours to soften you; and, by a confession, you would perhaps have merited our forgiveness. If what you allege were true, you would also have defeated the malice of your enemies; but your soul is hardened, the Divine Spirit is withdrawn from you; it is therefore our order that you be re-conducted to your dungeon.”

One of the inquisitors then rising, struck the table with violence, and a  
loud

loud rattling noise issued from beneath. It was a signal, and two of the familiars shortly after entered the chamber, making the same obeisance they had before done, at the conte's entrance, who was led back to his cell.

As the door closed upon him, he thought he heard Maddalena Rosa's name repeated. He was not mistaken, for she was at that instant summoned from her cell, and conducted into the presence of the lords inquisitors.

Similar forms were observed, and the oath administered, after which the inquisitor-general interrogated her in nearly the same terms as he had before done the conte. She confessed the manner of his discovering her; and then entered into a detail of the friendship that had subsisted between herself and sister Marietta, to whose sudden death she justly attributed those imaginary visions, which  
had

had unconsciously led her from her chamber to the grated parlour, where the remains of the nun had been so recently exposed. She also related the conte's journey to the castello di Valdarno, and the subsequent indisposition which had detained him there.

“You confidently then assert your innocence,” said the inquisitor, “and deny all knowledge of the manner by which Marcello Porta entered the convent?”

“Yes, I solemnly attest my integrity,” returned Maddalena, in a firm tone; “from the conte I learnt that a mysterious oath was connected with that circumstance, which compels him to maintain an eternal silence.”

The same inquisitor, whose forbidding aspect had so forcibly struck the conte, and whose scowling eyes had been fixed on Maddalena, from her first entrance



entrance into the chamber, with a malignant smile, then addressed her.—  
“ ’Twere better, Maddalena, that you avow your guilt. We already know you to have been concerned in this shameful crime. Marcello Porta has himself confessed that your interest with the portress, and the bribes with which you corrupted her honesty, obtained him his admission into the convent.”

The inquisitor-general then took up a paper, and pretended (for such are the arts practised by the righteous judges of this Holy Office) to read an interrogatory put to the conte, at his examination, containing his seeming avowal of her guilt.

Maddalena, with difficulty, repressed the horror and contempt she felt for this tribunal, on finding it guilty of such mean duplicity, as she did not harbour a doubt of the conte’s unsullied honour;  
and

and she exclaimed, in the dignity of insulted virtue—"I know the conte Marcello would despise an action that in the smallest degree derogated from the strict path of virtue. I know his uncontaminated soul would not basely stoop to criminate even an inveterate foe, to free himself from all the torments this tribunal can inflict! How much more, then, would he disdain to falsify and brand with infamy a helpless woman, who never offended him! Let him be summoned: if he himself avows the guilty deed, I am deceived, and virtue hath lost her image here on earth."

The inquisitor then presented to her the paper.—"Observe, Maddalena, his signature is hereto annexed."

She fixed her eyes upon the scroll, and saw the conte's name; but being unacquainted with his style of writing, gave no credence to this shameful forgery, and continued silent.

The

The same artful inquisitor who first intimated that the conte had made such a confession, again addressed her, in a voice loud and dissonant.—“ We shall humble that haughty tone, Maddalena Rosa. We shall teach the proud daughter of the duca Bertocci to respect, and not insult our sacred dignity, by daring to call our word in question. Those tortures which you hold in such seeming contempt, may perchance force from you a confession of your guilt, if our lenity should fail in its effects on your perverse and impious mind.”

“ The rack may agonize my frame,” returned Maddalena, “ but it shall never compel me to utter an untruth, much less to criminate myself. In the face of Heaven, I proclaim aloud my innocence, before that Power who will not abandon me, whose eye all-seeing, knows the integrity of my conduct : to Him I submit my cause ; His even justice will not err, but extricate me from these trying difficulties.

difficulties. He will clear me from the detested stigma wherewith I am falsely branded."

The same inquisitor, hastily rising from his seat, exclaimed with vehemence — "Insolent, perjured wretch ! dare not to call on Him, whose dreadful judgment will hereafter doom you to the torments your profanity so justly merits. We have another incontrovertible proof of your guilt. Wherefore did the portress Ursula quit the convent, a few hours subsequent to the discovery of your impious meeting with Marcello Porta, but because she would have been involved in your fate ? She dreaded the punishment to which your smooth tongue and seducing ore had subjected her."

"Oh that Ursula were here present !" cried Maddalena ; "she would pronounce me guiltless ; her lips would free me from the defamatory charge."

"They would utter the truth," returned a female voice.

Maddalena

Maddalena was struck speechless with astonishment, and after some moments had elapsed, gazed round the chamber with an inquiring look, that seemed to wish, and, at the same time, dread the encounter of what it sought; for she felt an inward sensation of terror, lest some treachery should be practised, that might seemingly involve her in the alleged crime; but no new object met her eye.

“ Did not sounds assail your ear, Maddalena Rosa?” said the grand inquisitor.

“ Methought I heard a female voice: it seemingly answered me, when I called on Ursula as a witness for me.”

“ She will be the witness in a just cause,” returned the same unknown person.

Maddalena, after a short pause, during which she summoned her utmost fortitude, replied—“ Then let her come forward and plead the cause of innocence ;

cence; for if it be Ursula, she will exculpate the wronged Maddalena Rosa."

"She will prove her guilt," was again the answer.

"Who will prove that?" reiterated Maddalena, in violent agitation.

"I will," continued the same-toned voice.

"Make your charge then known; come boldly forward and allege your proofs. But wherefore do I ask this? you are suborned, and guilt ever shuns the presence of innocence."

"I dare and will prove Maddalena's guilt," replied the stranger.

That inquisitor who had appeared so forward in his accusations, now exclaimed—"We are sufficiently convinced, from private evidence, that the prisoner is culpable. All that we require is, therefore, a confession from her own lips. Why then delay the torture? let it be instantly inflicted, to punish her perverseness."

He

He arose, his uplifted arm was on the point of striking the table; but the supreme inquisitor prevented him, and after a private conversation of some minutes, he resumed his seat, every feature betraying the strongest marks of disappointed rage. Even the virtuous Maddalena shuddered at his dreadful aspect, and turned from his countenance with disgust.

After affixing her signature to the paper whereon these various interrogatories were noted, the officials were summoned, and Maddalena was conducted back to her dungeon. The fortitude she had exerted now forsook her; she sunk on the selette, and raising her eyes towards heaven, resembled the statue of mute despair, or pensive pining melancholy. Her bosom was at length eased by a deep drawn-sigh, and her troubled soul unburthened itself in a plenteous flood of tears.

“ Alas !”

“Alas!” cried she, “where is now my hope? I am irrecoverably lost; for those who might avouch my innocence, conspire against me. Yes, it must be Ursula that spoke. She has acceded to the persuasions of my delators, and her false evidence will doubtless seal my fate. The torture will be administered, to draw forth a secret of which I am ignorant. My unavoidable silence will be construed by my judges into hardened obstinacy, and they will condemn me. This I could patiently endure; but then my name will be branded with infamy. I shall be made a public spectacle; and what is still more terrible, that virtuous being, the author of my existence, will, on his death bed, pronounce curses on the seeming guilty Maddalena Rosa. ’Tis that thought which racks my soul with anguish unutterable.”

Her eyes were at that moment turned on Marietta’s cross, that, like a friendly monitor,



monitor, had escaped the snowy bosom where it was wont to lay. Maddalena then recalled the dying counsel of her friend: she felt reanimated.—“ Yes, I still place my confidence in Heaven ! I look up to those blissful regions, of which thou, Marietta, art a blest inhabitant.”

She was suddenly interrupted in her reflections by a gentle voice, that sung the following couplet, with exquisite taste and judgment :—

Kind hope still pierces through the gloom,  
And sheds its friendly ray,  
To soften injur'd Virtue's doom,  
And cheer the ling'ring day.

These words bore such a coincidence with Maddalena's situation, that they almost seemed addressed to her, and produced an instantaneous effect upon her conduct. She arose from her seat, and traversing the dungeon, exclaimed —

“ Yes, hope shall comfort me. I will not yield myself a prey to unavailing sorrow, which would disgrace my conscious innocence. In what light would my honoured parent regard me, if, even in this gloomy habitation, I was to repine at my fate? All his fears would then be verified. He would instantly pronounce me guilty; for in his mind, virtue should rise superior to all the trials of this life. How would the conte, too, blush at my shameful weakness !”

A sigh escaped her lips, as she pronounced his name, and her cheeks were suffused with the tinge of the blushing rose.

Little did Maddalena conjecture that the conte was then yielding his mind a prey to the most unavailing sorrow. As the door of his cell closed, he threw himself upon his bed of rushes, and covering his face, gave way to all those  
gloomy

gloomy horrors his situation inspired. In this state he continued, without noticing the entrance of a person, who stood for some time observing him in silence. The conte was at length roused by hearing his name repeated ; he turned, and beheld a figure whose garments bespoke him to be of the Inquisition.

“ Would you conduct me to the torture ?” exclaimed he, passionately, rising from the earth. “ I am prepared to follow you ; for the rack will be heaven to those agonies which my mind endures.”

“ I would soothe those agonies,” replied the stranger, in a gentle tone ; “ I would teach you resignation.”

“ Do not mock me,” hastily retorted the conte, his eyes glaring eagerly.—“ Your habit sufficiently bespeaks your murderous occupation.”

“ The most brilliant diamond is to the eye but a rough stone, till the hand of the workman displays its beauty ; so the inquisitorial garb may often cover a

soul overflowing with mercy and compassion : but I forgive your hasty answer," continued the stranger, " for, cancer-like, affliction preys upon the heart, and sours the temper of the wretched sufferer."

" What comfort then would you offer?" said the conte, in a tone that showed his inward anguish. " The ordinances of this tribunal forbid all lenity to those who appear guilty in their eyes."

" Perhaps," answered the stranger, " I would converse on the subject nearest your heart. What if Maddalena Rosa——"

He was interrupted by the conte, who exclaimed with eagerness—" That is indeed the only theme which has power to charm my care-worn soul. If you possess charity, tell me, I conjure you, has my Rosa yet experienced any of the rigours of this Holy Office? for the  
dread-

dreadful threats of the inquisitor yet vibrate on my ear."

He was unable to proceed, and waited the reply in a state of mind bordering on distraction.

"She has undergone one examination, and is now returned to her cell; but no corporal punishment has been inflicted."

The conte, clasping his hands with fervour, exclaimed—"For this I thank thee, merciful Heaven!"

He paused. Then turning to the stranger, continued—"But have you seen her? Does she restrain from cursing the author of her sufferings?"

"Were you to behold her, conte, how would you blush at your want of fortitude!—how would you admire the nobleness of her soul! Yes, conte, I have seen and conversed with her. She possesses every noble qualification that nature, in her happiest mood, bestows, to  
render

render an earthly being perfect. Instead of curses, she heaps blessings on your head, and will freely offer up herself a sacrifice to preserve your honour. Ah, conte! could you value happiness, you would be tranquil, even in this dread abode—for donna Maddalena loves you.”

“What art thou?” cried the astonished conte. “What supernatural being is it that now stands before me? for surely you are no inmate of this abode of misery.”

“I am of this world,” replied the stranger, “and one whose person is not altogether unknown to you.”

As he concluded these words, he discovered himself; when the conte’s eye was struck with the well-remembered person of the youth that had attempted the duca Bertocci’s life.

“What do I behold?” was the involuntary

luntary exclamation that escaped his lips.

“The same person, conte, who formerly appeared to you in the light of an assassin.”

“What mean these mysteries?” continued Marcello Porta.—“You are no inquisitor, yet have free access to these dungeons. You are a midnight murderer, and a generous comforter; you seek the father’s life, yet soothe the misfortunes of his child. Whence arise these strange contradictions? What is your name? Reveal, I entreat you, these inexplicable truths.”

“You, Marcello, inviolably withhold your secret; so will I keep mine.”

Having uttered these words, the youth quitted the cell, leaving him absorbed in wonder and amazement.

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